

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Tragedy brings out the best and the worst in us. Yesterday's horrific terrorist attacks in Paris gave rise to both. The bravery of the first responders in rescuing more than 100 people from the lethal gunmen intent on killing all the people in that theatre was a great blessing. The leaders of our nation and the community of nations promising to stand by and with the suffering people of France spoke for all of us. The unifying effect of this attack on the people of France and all humanity that yearns for peace assures us that evil and those intent on evil will indeed fail.

But the attacks also brought forth from their slumber the prophets of doom, who are convinced and want to convince the rest of us that this is the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it. For instance, last night as I was watching the reports of the attacks, I was praying for the victims, their families, the parents who will never hug their children again; the children who were orphaned; the first responders who were risking their lives, I received a phone call from an old friend. She was hysterical. She said, "They'll be here next week, blowing us up. Killing us!" I said, "Whoa, what makes you say a thing like that?" She said, "They hate us. All Muslims hate us! Their's is a religion of hatred, not peace!" I tried to calm her down and reason with her, pointing out that you can't blame more than one and a half billion people for the evil actions of a few." She went ballistic and told me I was stupid and blind and hung up on me.

I later called her back, told her I was sorry she was so upset, and said, that though we have different world views, we shouldn't allow it harm our friendship. I said, "That really would be a win for the terrorists." She agreed and we promised to pray for each other.

I may be stupid and blind, but I'm really glad that today our liturgy focuses our attention on what we call "the end times". Our first reading from the Book of Daniel assures a suffering people that God knows what is happening and that their (and our) suffering is not the end of the story. God's final action in history—which is God's final judgment on history—will be full of hope for the just. The Psalmist has us reflect in our prayer that we have, in fact, inherited the promises of God Himself. "Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption." The Sacred Writer of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that what is already accomplished in Christ is still in process for us who are living in history. Though his work is accomplished, Christ waits for us who continue to live in hope, knowing that all that happens in our lives is a part of our ongoing consecration; the grace-filled process of becoming one with God.

In this 13th Chapter of the Gospel of Mark, we hear Jesus ruminating on the end of the world. It's important that we put the words of this reading into proper context. The chapter begins with the story of the poor widow we read of last week that Jesus praises for

her faith in giving her all to God. Instead of picking up on his message, the disciples, who are so very much like us, exercised their selective attention deficit disorder whenever the conversation turns to sacrifice or suffering. They really don't want to hear it. 'Fess up! Neither do we. So they change the conversation. They start talking about the massive blocks of stone which make up the magnificent Temple.

This leads into this conversation on "the end times" when the Lord tells his disciples, "... not one stone will be left upon another—all will be torn down." Now Jesus was speaking both symbolically of his own body; and literally of the Temple, which in fact was destroyed about 40 years after his Resurrection and Ascension to the Father.

There are three sayings of Jesus that it seems to me that are important for us to keep in mind when we hear talk of the end of the world. First he says, "When you hear about wars and threats of war, do not be afraid. Such things are bound to happen, but this is not yet the end." And so it has been throughout human history—war after war after war.

Secondly, he tells us, "False messiahs and false prophets will appear performing signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even the chosen. So be constantly on guard." In other words, if someone comes along promising to fix all the problems in the world, or another blames all the problems on a whole group of people, start looking for the snake oil.

Finally, the Lord tells us, "As to the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven, nor even the Son, but only the Father. Jesus is telling us that He Himself doesn't know when the end will come. So, again, He tells us, "Be on guard!"

I believe that in the face of the terrorism that stalks the earth today, it would be well for us to heed these words of the Lord, rather than allow the terrorists, as well as those false prophets who claim to have all the answers, to imprison us in a prison of fear or a prison of anxiety or a prison of hatred or a prison of anger. The Lord calls us in such times to be on guard by holding fast to his words in faith, in hope, and in a peaceful spirit, trusting that He will "show us the path to life, fullness of joys in His presence, the delights at His right hand forever."