

Meditation 8: Pilgrims of the apocalypse

My dear Pilgrims, I watched you yesterday trudging through the beautiful Rambolitan forest and I found myself thinking: “You look strangely like me.” You look strangely like me, even though a millennium separates us. I, a pilgrim from the Middle Ages, also travelled the same plains of Beauce. I knew your fatigue and your poverty in this endless walk that is the pilgrimage to the feet of the Virgin. I too dreamed of this famous, glorious, resurrected body. I dreamed, it’s true, more than meditated on the sky where our bodies will be able, without suffering, to enjoy the agility that transports them where they want, when they want.

Major ideas

- Waiting for the Apocalypse
- Nostalgia for the lost paradise, the Apocalypse
- The hope of the Christian of the Apocalypse
- The renovation of the universe
- The last judgement
- The renewal of all things



Dear pilgrims, in the weariness of this morning, your imagination begins to work. This is where our paths cross. Let me then, my friend, take a few steps with you.

I would modestly like to awaken in you an aspiration that is too often unconscious in your Faith. I want to talk to you about the Apocalypse.

It's good to think about the end of the world

Ah, you don't like talking about it? You think it's a "killjoy". And then, what's the point of talking about it, you will ask me, since we will know "neither the day nor the hour." It's true, and we must not fall into the trap of announcing the end of times when things are going bad. If the time of our death is not known to us, that of the end of the world is not known either. And yet, Christ also tells us that he knows how to look for the warning signs of the end.

Besides, here is what your catechism tells you, and therefore your faith:

“Before the coming of Christ, the Church must pass through a final test which will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution which accompanies his pilgrimage on earth will reveal the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious imposture providing men with an apparent solution to their problems at the cost of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious imposture is that of the Anti-Christ, that is to say that of a pseudo-messianism where man glorifies himself in place of God and his Messiah who came in the flesh. The Kingdom will therefore not be accomplished by a historic triumph of the Church but by a victory of God over the ultimate unleashing of evil which will bring down his Bride from Heaven. The triumph of God over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the ultimate cosmic shaking of this passing world.”

Why tell us all this? I believe that if the Lord has revealed these signs to us, it is so that we remain vigilant: “Be ready, you too: it is in the hour when you do not think about it that the

Son of 'man will come." In my time, we thought about the end of the world: it was written on the tympanums of our cathedrals. We had a certain fear of it, but that did not stop us from working. To meditate on the end of the world is to remember that this present world will only last for a while, that it is not eternal, that we must make it the stool of Heaven, because "our city is in the heavens."

The return of Christ in glory

And our fear then transformed into desire. It is not for nothing that the last Book of the Bible ends with this vibrant message: "Yes, my return is near!" Amen, come, Lord Jesus!" For two thousand years we have said it in the Creed: "He [Christ] will return in glory, to judge the living and the dead. I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." We don't just say that Christ will return: we also say that we wait for him, that we hope for his return! Yes, Christ must return to make all things new. The Christian awaits the return to order, the world as a splendid image of its Creator. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and great glory." If he came under the condition of a slave during the first advent, during the second advent, even the blind will be able to recognize Christ in all his Glory. This will be Christ Pantocrator (from pan: "all", and kratos: power; the sovereign Christ Master of all).

The last judgement

Your generation has difficulty with the idea of a God who judges: it prefers a God who is only merciful, as if the two, justice and mercy, were incompatible. But is a world in which sin triumphs without being punished, as is too often the case today, a good world? On the contrary, it is good that evil is condemned, and that those who have definitively refused to love are judged. Yes, "At the eternal banquet, the wicked will not sit indiscriminately at the table next to the victims, as if nothing had happened." Do you not then hear, with sweet consolation, the voice of the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his throne of glory. All nations will be gathered before him; he will separate men from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats: he will place the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

But, you will ask me, why is there a need for a final judgment, if there has already been the particular judgment of each person at the moment of death? First, because this moment of the last judgment is revealed to us by God, on multiple occasions; then, because our sins all have a social dimension, and can have echoes long after the person's death: if a soul that rises elevates the world, the one that falls brings others with its fall. Certainly, he who has been placed in heaven or hell by the particular judgment will not change his state with the last judgment. But the last souls in purgatory will be delivered. And above all it is important that "the whole truth be told", that full justice be rendered on our actions and on the consequences of our actions in history, and that the triumph of Christ be clearly manifested to all, which is the Truth. This is why there must be a public judgment, exercised by Christ, at the end of time.

The Last Judgment will be the advent of Truth in all the splendour of its Glory. Such a great sinner falsely considered a good person in the eyes of the world will be judged, in full light, for what he really is. And we will discover with admiration the full extent of the good done by a little Carmelite sister, locked up in a convent, forgotten by everyone, but who offers herself for the salvation of the world. For, as Saint Luke says: "There is nothing hidden that

must not be discovered, nor secret that must not be known." And also, we will finally have an understanding of God's plan: all these divine choices which seem so mysterious, so strange to us, like the permission of evil, all this will appear in full light, and we will say with all the elect: "He did all things well."

The renovation of the universe

"We are waiting," says Saint Peter, "for new heavens and a new earth, where justice dwells." By returning to Earth, not only will Christ judge men, but he will renew all things: for if the end of the world is the final triumph of Christ over evil and sin, all the evil consequences of sin must disappear. The order of creation shaken by the original fall will therefore be restored. Please note, this is not a restoration "as before", a pure and simple return to earthly paradise. In fact, it is very difficult if not impossible to say what the Universe will look like after the end of the world. But what we know is that it will not be a purely spiritual universe, composed of souls and angels: because there is a certainty of faith, which we also say in the Creed: I believe in the resurrection of the body.

The resurrection of the body

Death, which is the separation of soul and body, is a consequence of sin. Our soul is immortal: but, even in the bliss of Heaven after death, it remains in a state of imperfection – Saint Thomas even speaks of a state of violence – as long as it is separated from the body. Because we are not a soul imprisoned in a body: we are body and soul, all together. With Saint Paul "we ardently await, as Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure our body of misery to conform it to his body of glory." And it will be our body, a real body! Of course, it will have particularities: it will be whole, that is to say perfect, without illnesses, handicaps or infirmities; it will be glorious, like the body of Christ after his resurrection: impassive (no suffering), subtle and agile (because the soul will perfectly dominate the body), and luminous, transparent to this light of the soul which will reflect on the body as it did for Christ at the Transfiguration. In a word, there will be a beauty in Heaven, a sensitive and visible beauty, like the beauty of Christ and the Virgin Mary who already, at this very moment, possess their bodies in the Universe of Glory.

So, what will the world look like next? There are many mysteries about this, and there is no point in making "theology fiction". We know that we will live in society, and that to the joy of seeing God in the company of Christ, will be added the happiness of sharing the lives of saints and angels. There we will be fully men and women, and not transformed into angels... Our most beautiful task will be to participate in the celestial liturgy, this tribute of glory and adoration of God, full of jubilation and praise, which will be carried by Christ, and of which the liturgy of the earth is an image and a preparation. For the rest... well we will see, and we are carried by the confidence that the Lord loves us and promises us a life that exceeds all expectations.

Yes, we can't wait. "Your kingdom come!" But for this reign to fully arrive, the harvest must be ripe. So: may your kingdom come, Lord, at the moment you want it! This is the attitude of the Church which must be ours: a permanent tension, unworn despite the centuries, towards its end and its perfection, towards this moment when it will definitively pass from militant to triumphant; and total abandonment: the Lord will come when he wants.

Now I am silent and let you meditate on this story from the Apocalypse where Saint John describes in a few words the beauty of what awaits us.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed

away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "Behold the tabernacle of God with men! He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, and there will be no more mourning, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And he said: "Write; for these words are certain and true." And he said to me: "It is done! I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life, freely. He who overcomes will inherit these things; I will be his God, and he will be my son."