



## Advent Reflections 2010

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**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010**

**Theme = *The Second Coming (Parousia)***

**[Gospel Reading for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent - Matthew 24:37-44](#)**

*Jesus said to the disciples, "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."*

## Advent

**Advent** (from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "coming") is a season observed in many Western Christian churches, a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas. It is the beginning of the Western liturgical year and commences on Advent Sunday.

## The Nicene Creed

The formulation of the Nicene Creed began during the First Council of Nicea in 325AD. It was revised and expanded by the Bishops who attended the First Council of Constantinople in 381AD and it was here a final version was agreed upon.

Clauses in the Creed linked with the Parousia are:

- He Will Come Again in Glory to Judge the Living and the Dead and His Kingdom Will Have No End.
- We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Life of the World to Come.

## The Parousia - Christ's Second Coming

**Parousia** is an ancient Greek word meaning presence, arrival, or official visit.

Catholic Christians have always believed that Jesus Christ would come back to close the current period of human history in earth. The time when Jesus will return is given many names:

- the Day of the Lord
- the Parousia
- the End Times
- the Second Coming (Advent) of Christ
- the Epiphany

1. The Bible describes the events of Jesus' return in apocalyptic images:

**Mark 13:26-27**

And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather (his) elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

**Matthew 16:27**

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

**Acts 1:11**

They (two men dressed in white) said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**

For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words.

2. The Parousia will be unmistakable because it will be accompanied by unprecedented signs:

**Matthew 24:27**

For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

3. Some signs are general events concerning the evangelization of the world:

**Matthew 24:14**

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.

4. Other signs are more proximate. Mark (Chapter 13), Matthew (Chapter 24), and Luke (Chapter 21) all describe the unmistakable signs with apocalyptic images:

**2 Timothy 4:1-2**

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word ...

**2 Timothy 3:1-5**

But understand this: there will be terrifying times in the last days. People will be self-centred and lovers of money, proud, haughty, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious, callous, implacable, slanderous, licentious, brutal, hating what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, as they make a pretence of religion but deny its power. Reject them.

5. No one knows exactly when this will occur:

**Mark 13:32**

(Jesus began his discourse ...) "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

**1 Thessalonians 5:2**

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night.

**2 Peter 3:10**

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.

6. The Catholic Church teaches that we should avoid pointless speculations about the time, the details of the signs, the nature of the difficulties, etc. The Church focuses instead on the need for living the Gospel so as to be prepared for the Parousia whenever it happens:

**Mark 13:33,35-37**

(Jesus began his discourse ...) "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. ... Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

**1 Peter 1:13-16**

Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, live soberly, and set your hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Like obedient children, do not act in compliance with the desires of your former ignorance but, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, "Be holy because I (am) holy."

In Joseph Ratzinger's (now Pope Gregory XVI) book, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1988), he says: "Instead of trying to predict the future, we should live the reality of the presence of Christ in the Church and in the Eucharist, "until that time when the Lord himself gives to it that final reality which meanwhile can be sought only in image." (pg. 204)

7. The Specific Teaching of the Catholic Church about the Parousia:

This can be found in the Catechism -

**The Church's ultimate trial**

**675** Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers.<sup>574</sup> The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth<sup>575</sup> will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.<sup>576</sup>

**676** The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism,<sup>577</sup> especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.<sup>578</sup>

**677** The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection.<sup>579</sup> The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven.<sup>580</sup> God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world.<sup>581</sup>

## II. TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

**678** Following in the steps of the prophets and John the Baptist, Jesus announced the judgment of the Last Day in his preaching.<sup>582</sup> Then will the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts be brought to light.<sup>583</sup> Then will the culpable unbelief that counted the offer of God's grace as nothing be condemned.<sup>584</sup> Our attitude to our neighbour will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love.<sup>585</sup> On the Last Day Jesus will say: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."<sup>586</sup>

**679** Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the world. He "acquired" this right by his cross. The Father has given "all judgment to the Son".<sup>587</sup> Yet the Son did not come to judge, but to save and to give the life he has in himself.<sup>588</sup> By rejecting grace in this life, one already judges oneself, receives according to one's works, and can even condemn oneself for all eternity by rejecting the Spirit of love.<sup>589</sup>

### IN BRIEF

**680** Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of Christ's kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil.

**681** On Judgment Day at the end of the world, Christ will come in glory to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil which, like the wheat and the tares, have grown up together in the course of history.

**682** When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works, and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace.

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574 Cf. *Lk* 18:8; *Mt* 24:12.

575 Cf. *Lk* 21:12; *Jn* 15:19-20.

576 Cf. *2 Thess* 2:4-12; *1 Thess* 5:2-3; *2 Jn* 7; *1 Jn* 2:18,22.

577 Cf. DS 3839.

578 Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, condemning the "false mysticism" of this "counterfeit of the redemption of the lowly"; cf. *GS* 20-21.

579 Cf. *Rev* 19:1-9.

580 Cf *Rev* 13:8; 20:7-10; 21:2-4.

581 Cf. *Rev* 20:12 *2 Pet* 3:12-13.

582 Cf. *Dan* 7:10; *Joel* 3-4; *Mal* 3:19; *Mt* 3:7-12.

583 Cf *Mk* 12:38-40; *Lk* 12:1-3; *Jn* 3:20-21; *Rom* 2:16; *1 Cor* 4:5.

584 Cf. *Mt* 11:20-24; 12:41-42.

585 Cf. *Mt* 5:22; 7:1-5.

586 *Mt* 25:40.

587 *Jn* 5:22; cf. 5:27; *Mt* 25:31; *Acts* 10:42; 17:31; *2 Tim* 4:1.

588 Cf. *Lk* 21:12; *Jn* 15:19-20.

589 Cf. *Jn* 3:18; 12:48; *Mt* 12:32; *1 Cor* 3:12-15; *Heb* 6:4-6; 10:26-31.

8. Explanation Courtesy of Colin B. Donovan, STL:

The Catholic Church specifically condemns "millenarianism," according to which Jesus will establish a throne in this world and reign here for a thousand years [CCC 676]. She teaches instead that Jesus already reigns in eternity (1 Corinthians 15:24-27, Revelation 4 & 5) and that in this world His reign, established as a seed, is found already in the Church [CCC 668-669]. This is the 1000 years, which is the Hebrew way of indicating an indefinite long time - in this case, the time between the first and second comings, the era of the Church, in other words the last days in the broadest sense. The Book of Revelation situates this era between the persecutions of the Roman antichrists of the first century and the final unleashing of evil at the end.

The Catechism provides us with a general order of events at the End [CCC 673-677].

Chronologically they are:

- i. the full number of the Gentiles come into the Church
- ii. the "full inclusion of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of the full number of the Gentiles" (#ii will follow quickly on in the wake of #i)
- iii. a final trial of the Church "in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth." The supreme deception is that of the Antichrist.
- iv. Christ's victory over this final unleashing of evil through a cosmic upheaval of this passing world and the Last Judgment.

As Cardinal Ratzinger once pointed out (in the context of the message of Fátima), we are not at the end of the world. In fact, the Second Coming (understood as the physical return of Christ) cannot occur until the full number of the Gentiles are converted, followed by "all Israel."

Approved Catholic mystics (Venerables, Blessed and Saints, approved apparitions) throw considerable light on this order, by prophesying a minor apostasy and tribulation toward the end of the world, after which will occur the reunion of Christians. Only later will the entire world fall away from Christ (the great apostasy) and the personal Antichrist arise and the Tribulation of the End occur.

Although this is not Catholic doctrine, arising as it does from private revelation, it conforms to what is occurring in our time, especially in light of Our Lady of Fátima's promise of an "Era of Peace." This "Triumph of the Immaculate Heart" (other saints have spoken of a social reign of Jesus Christ when Jesus will reign in the hearts of men) would seem to occur prior to the rise of the Antichrist. The optimism of the Pope for the "New Evangelization" and a "Civilization of Love" in the Third Millennium of Christianity fits here, as well.

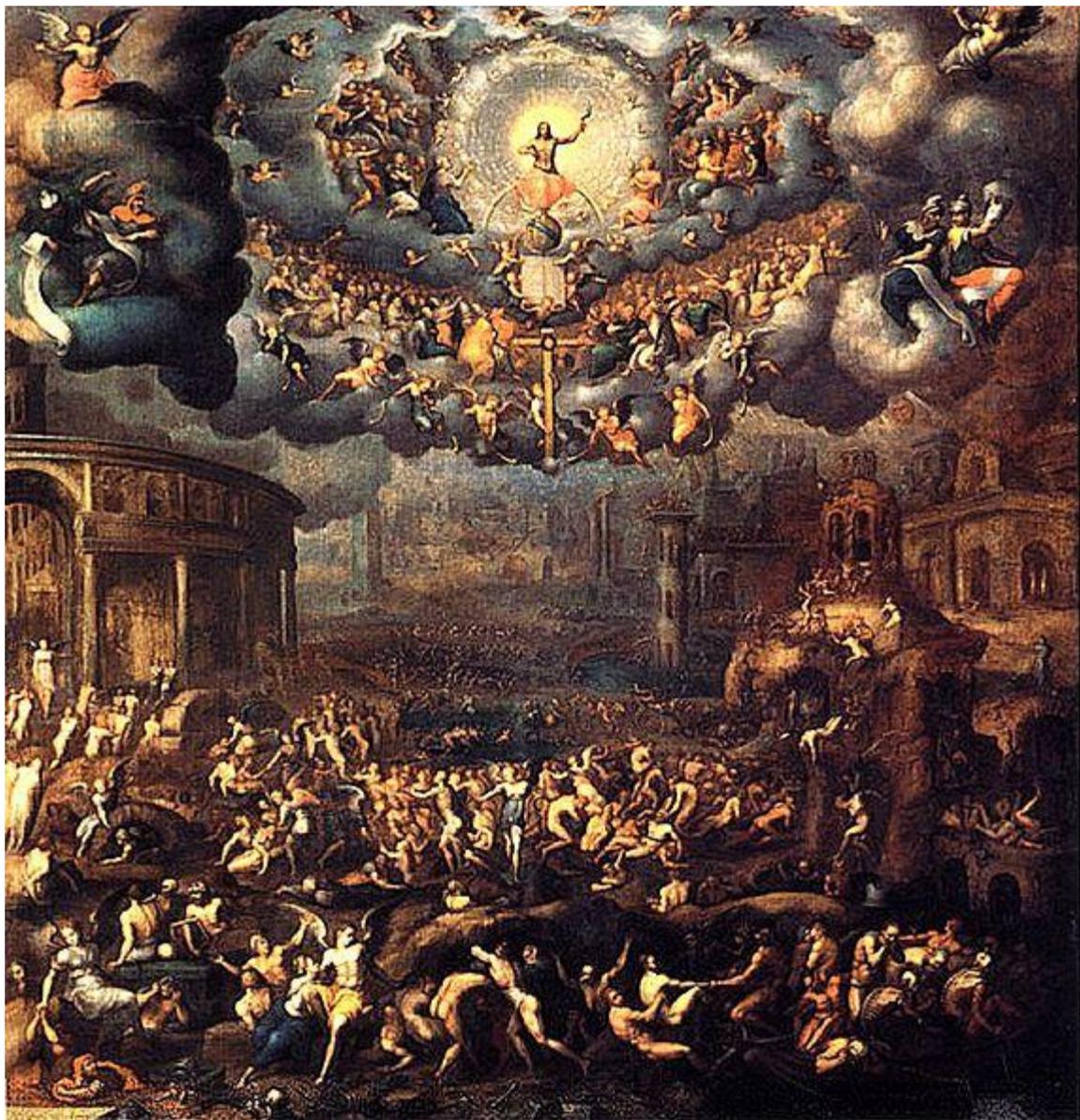
This would place us, therefore, in the period just before the events spoken of in the Catechism, that is, on the verge of the evangelization of the entire world.<sup>1</sup>

9. Literary Parallels:

Many Stories have at their central core the fight between good and evil. This included many of the Fairy Tales we were brought up with.

With specific reference to apocalyptic type happenings there are indeed many novels that fall within this genre including J. R. R. Tolkien – The Lord of the Rings, C. S. Lewis – The Chronicles of Narnia, even J. K. Rowlings Harry Potter series.

There are also a whole range of movies that follow this theme and format.



***The Last Judgement - The Louvre***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/endtimes.htm>