

In our own time, there have been those who have predicted that the end was near because of some tragedy that has shaken our world. The terrible tsunami in 2004 was such an event. Over 200,000 people were dead in minutes. Some people took from that awful event that God was preparing for the end of the world. There is nothing new in people claiming such knowledge. It happened in the time of Jesus, and it will happen again in our time, as well. In the world in which Jesus lived, there were certain events that seemed to foretell the end of the world. Just such an event, was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. To some people that event signalled the time when Jesus would come again and the end was near. Mark is careful to teach that the end of the world is not going to be connected with any event that we can orchestrate.

Jesus is recorded using the story of the Temple being destroyed in the Gospels to make an important point. History tells us that on a clear day the Temple in Jerusalem was visible from miles away. The reason it was so easy to see was that it was constructed of huge pieces of white marble and when the sun struck it just right it almost looked like a snow-covered mountain. Not unlike our own St Paul's or St Patrick's Cathedral, Flinders St Station, the Royal Exhibition Building and the State Parliament Building, they are all a visible reminders of stability and strength. If they were to be simultaneously destroyed, the State of Victoria would be rocked to its foundations- we would be rocked to our foundations.

Anyone who had ever seen the Temple knew that it was always going to be standing as a witness to the greatness of God. The huge marble pieces would stand the test of time and would always remind the Jewish people of the permanence of their place in the promised land.

Earlier in our Gospel Mark tells us that the disciples asked Jesus a very human question. If what Jesus has taught them is true, namely that the Temple itself will fall, when will this catastrophic event take place? It's a reasonable question, one that they would want to know because they would have been afraid that when it happened, they would not be ready and might die! So significant was the Temple to the people of Israel.

Do you remember *The Poseidon Adventure* from 1972 often repeated on television. You might remember that a cruise ship was turned upside down by a big wave. In fact the publicity posters described it as "Hell, Upside Down" at the time. Everything was turned upside down. Reality was turned "upside down." The way out was up to the bottom, and back to the front. The survivors had to go to the bottom of the boat, which was now the top, to get out. A whole group of people were not willing to follow the lead of the priest played by Gene Hackman, to crawl up a Christmas tree to get out of the ballroom, to safety. He said: "Everybody is dead who was above us when the ship turned over. Now they're underneath us. It's up to us to get out of here." (1)

The people who waited for help drowned, but those who were willing to risk, to have faith eventually were saved. Not all, but most. The priest was indeed the Christ figure for those people. They eventually trusted in him and were saved. So for us it is no different, "But not a hair of your head will perish." Jesus says, "By your endurance you will gain your souls. By your endurance you will gain your lives. By your faith in me you will be free" (Luke 21:18-19).

We live in a very confusing world. We live in a world where there is suffering, pain, and sorrow. We live in a world where competing ideologies and religions threaten to undo our ability to live with

ourselves and together in peace. Things may seem that they are not as they once were. The world is certainly not simple and it is not innocent. Our young people today are exposed to a world where terrorism, predicted ecological disaster, pestilence and plague, vacillating and competing notions of human identity and indifference have a strong grip on our psyche. And they have every right to question where history is going. We dare not miss the opportunity to help them, like the disciples, learn that they do not need worry about the end of the world. If you live life not worried about the end of the world, you will live life to its fullest now and that will help everyone. It doesn't mean that we do not champion justice or are not active in our Christian advocacy. Far from it. St Paul writing to the Corinthians (I Cor 1:7) reminds us that as Christians we are not to sit back waiting for the end. However, today we are faced in a post-modern world with a kind of indifference, relativity, insecurity, alarmism, pessimism and cynicism; a feeling of hopelessness that threatens the very foundation of our world. St Paul in his second letter to Timothy writes: "The time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine: they will gather round a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3). Now, as it was over 2,000 years ago, the ultimate answer can be found in and through Jesus Christ, and there is certainly no need for us to be afraid!

Christian people have nothing to fear about death or the end of the world. In our suffering and pain, we have nothing to fear. We will not be immune to the pain of this world. Christians are not set apart from the world, and must engage the world for the benefit of all and will surely experience all the harsh realities of this world.

Henry David Thoreau, author and one of the first environmentalists wrote these words when this Church was being built in 1862 because he was concerned, more than 150 years ago, that people were so busy making a living and worrying about the future that they didn't know how to enjoy life. "I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of walking, that is, of taking walks, who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering." (2)

As we live out our days and await eternity — whenever it may come — why not spend every day trying to experience in some way the joy of living, no matter how many days we may have to live? Let's ask ourselves: How is it with sauntering — with the joy of living — in our time? In our place? Perhaps we need to slow down in order to keep moving.

Hope for the future, hope for today, is worth living for. Making each day count even if it is just taking a walk. We cannot fear the future, because that is in God's hands, we cannot fear today, because that is in God's hands, too. So live and work for the moment and wait. Wait for the coming not with fear, but with hope. We wait planning our lives, engaging the world for the betterment of all, living our lives, hoping our Christian example and life will mean something to those around us.

Fr Robert Newton

- 1) *The Poseidon Adventure* 1972 Directed by Ronald Neame 20th Century Fox
- 2) Henry David Thoreau *Walking* Cricket House Books 2010 LLC