

The End of Days

Spurred on by the news of North Korea's most recent, provocative, nuclear test, I googled the term "thermonuclear" in order to find out the difference between that term and mere "nuclear." It was a very interesting article in Wikipedia which, with words and diagrams, detailed how a thermonuclear weapon requires the fusion of atoms to release immense destructive power. Whereas, an old fashioned "Atom Bomb" uses a less powerful "fission" reaction wherein atoms are split.

What is astonishing to me is that, in order to create enough energy to fuse the hydrogen atoms for a thermonuclear weapon, a regular nuclear bomb is required. Contained inside of a hard cask, the nuclear bomb detonates first and its power is focused on several forms of hydrogen atoms, causing an immense implosion which leads to the fusion reaction, (Hydrogen Bomb). The power of such a weapon is such that it would completely obliterate the largest of our cities by itself.

It is a strange déjà vu for those of us old enough to remember the rhetoric of the Cold War with the Soviets: How is it that we are back within this particular zone of anxiety? Wasn't global terrorism enough?

Our confrontation with all of this coincides with the near-end of the Church Year wherein we begin to contemplate the end-of-times, the Day of the Lord," and the Judgment Day. These themes will become most prominent in the first two weeks of Advent, but they begin to pop up, already, in September.

Perhaps the most important words to remember from this Biblical perspective are "*you know not the day nor the hour*" (Matt. 24:36). While Jesus does produce a catalog of signs and portents signaling the end of days, (see Mt. 24:4-8) and such things can heighten the anticipation of one who has been watching for such things, it remains true that no one can know the exact moment of the end.

Still, the text of Matthew 24 provides a startling correspondence with current events in such a way as to give one pause. In that text, Jesus says the following: ***You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.***

Kim Jong Un's hydrogen bomb test registered like an earthquake throughout Asia. His saber rattling and the responses from our president make us wonder how perilously close we are to the unleashing of the terrible powers at our disposal. Meanwhile, on the other side of the planet, the wars of terrorism rage and in places like South Sudan, people are starving to death.

Whether these are real signs of the End Times could only be verified if the Lord did, in fact, come on clouds of glory, accompanied by an army of angels. But Jesus does seem to indicate that our self-destructive tendencies as human beings plays some role in all created reality coming to its conclusion. We cannot begin to imagine what this looks like, since even the Biblical descriptions are likely attempts to describe the indescribable.



It is fruitful for us, as Christians, to contemplate these matters. As scripture instructs, we must remain "*awake and sober,*" (1Thess. 5:6). This certainly cannot mean living as if the current threats and problems of the world are the true portents of the end. These things have all happened before in our history, and they repeat over and over again. Sobriety and wakefulness must certainly be something different than a heightened anticipation of apocalyptic events. If we cannot know the day nor the hour, then steadfastness in faith, in worship, in prayer and in charity (love) must be the key to the proper disposition.

But given the terrible things we are now seeing and contemplating, let us redouble our prayers for our world leaders. Let us pray that they will keep in mind the children of our planet, the truth of our common humanity, the irreplaceability of our home planet and our common destiny in the Creator who watches over us and knows the heart of every person.