

The end of the world will come this Thanksgiving Day, according to the newspaper in the checkout stand at the grocery store in Cameron this week. The paper is not the only prophet out there. There have always been lots of predictions about the end of the world. Take this quote, for example: "The earth is degenerating today. Bribery and corruption abound. Children no longer obey their parents, everyone wants to write a book, and it is evident that the end of the world is fast approaching." That was found on an Assyrian tablet in the year 2800 BC. A character in the *Peanuts* comic strip once said, "Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia."

Some people predict the end is near because we've never had so many natural disasters around the world as we do now, but we have. The knowledge of them and the reporting of them are better than ever. Still, you will hear a lot of ridiculous testimony from people who say they have studied the bible as well as current events and have concluded that the world is coming to an end on a particular day at a specific hour. They write newspaper articles and books, they set up web sites, they fill the airways with their teachings. Some of them are probably sincere; others are just out to make a buck that they will spend after the deadline for doomsday passes by.

We have to expect some of this because Jesus predicted a host of catastrophes: false messiahs, wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, plagues and awesome and mighty signs from the sky. All those appear just in today's gospel. To those standing around Jesus in the shadow of the Temple, he predicted that there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down. That prediction came to pass about 40 years after Jesus died. He exaggerated only a bit: The Jerusalem Temple he knew and loved was reduced to rubble, but the western wall still stands, sometimes called the Wailing Wall. Jesus himself laid eyes on that wall, but the rest of the Temple is gone.

So when will the end of the world come? I can tell you. We don't know. We don't know that any more than we know when the end of our lives will come. But to Jesus, *when* didn't matter; he cared about *how* we live now. "By your perseverance you will secure your lives," he says. When you are faithful to his teaching every day, no matter how difficult, you will secure your lives, and that is what matters.

We all face catastrophes. In the Midwest we deal with tornadoes and flooding, ice storms and heat waves. We face serious diseases and accidental deaths. We all pray to be spared from disaster. Jesus has another philosophy. He doesn't want bad things to happen to us, but he is more interested in something else, in how we act when things go wrong. He says to the disciples about the coming persecutions, "It will lead to your giving testimony." It will let you speak your faith so that others will learn what matters to you.

Some people lose their faith in God when things go wrong, but others gain new strength. They realize that their relationship with God is not just based on the avoidance of catastrophe, but on life, faith, and hope.