

There are two problems with the end of the world. One is knowledge and the other is negligence.

Consider the first. Some people figure the best way to approach the end of the world is to obtain knowledge about when it will happen. Several groups fall into this category. Some consult the stars as if the simple arrangement of planets will produce a cosmic horoscope. Some consult the Bible and from the apocalyptic passages they compute the precise events which will herald the Second Coming. Among these are some biblical fundamentalists. Even some Catholics fall into this category which seeks knowledge about the end of the world. For example, some take literature from the apparitions of Our Lady and, presuming that they contain a secret body of knowledge, they take pains to predict the end of the world with much detail.

This entire category of individuals presumes there is secret knowledge, and that obtaining this knowledge is the best approach to the end of the world. The problem with it is we don't know when the end will come, and the question **when** distracts us from the more important question **how** should we live to prepare.

The second problem with the end of the world is negligence. Many people are aware that there will be an end to the world, but they prefer to ignore the whole business. "Sure the world will end," people reason, "but I won't live to see it." Since people in this category are less concerned about the world to come, they place more emphasis on this world. Personal achievement and success in business take on a higher priority than living for the Kingdom of God. If the end of the world is a distant reality, people lie, people cheat to get ahead, because the goal is in this life, not in the life to come.

The problem with this category is that there will be a final reckoning and people will be caught off guard. It happens in daily life. Servicemen on the U.S.S. Stark, investors in stocks, prison guards in Atlanta and Oakdale--in spite of precautions, we are caught off guard.

Jesus tells us to be constantly on the watch, to stay awake. The end may very well be far away but it may also be quite near. Since we don't know, we live as if the end were near. Why? Because that will help us reach decisions in a moral way. If you knew the world would end soon, say Christmas Day, what would you do? Would you tell someone you loved them? Would you overcome resentments? Would you be less stingy? How would you live differently? The Christian lives as if the end were near. We live each day as if loving were the most important thing. We live each day with an urgency the rest of the world cannot feel. We live each day with our eyes fixed on the things of heaven, not on the things of earth.

If this Christmas were your last Christmas, what gifts would you buy the people you love? You see it's those gifts which carry the message of Christmas, which carry the urgency of Advent--Be on the watch, stay awake. Live moral lives, live loving lives, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.