

Two weeks ago as I read the morning newspaper at breakfast a headline on the front page captured my attention. Dated Raleigh, North Carolina it proclaimed: *“End of time coming May 21? Christian group believes so.”* If true, Judgment Day is almost here. The article went on to report that a populist movement of Christians loosely organized by radio broadcasts, websites and independent churches is convinced by their reading and interpretation of the Bible that the end of the world will begin on May 21. Judgment Day is almost here!

This story, and similar past predictions like it, represent a type of Christian spirituality that when it comes to dealing with Jesus limits him to his historical life and work which were, and continue to be, edifying for personal and communal reflection and emulation, but ended with his death and resurrection. This Jesus now reigns in heaven far removed from the joys and tragedies of the world until the day when he will return to rescue all who have “accepted him as their personal Lord and Savior” and so are “saved” before returning to destroy an evil and sinful world. A believer’s job is to stay “righteous” and watch for the signs that Jesus is about to return to right all the wrongs that have taken place since he was last here and be ready to be carried off to heaven at a moment’s notice. This spirituality and its expectation are what is known as “The Rapture”. The popular “Left Behind” series of novels by the author Tom LaHaye are a populist proponent of this spirituality. However, the “Rapture” is not part of Catholic theology or spirituality.

To be sure, Jesus was a historical figure. He was born, lived, worked and died in a particular time and place. Also, for people of faith, this same Jesus rose from the dead and was glorified by his Father as Lord of heaven and earth and, according to his own word, will return to complete the work he began and usher in a world renewed and restored to its original grace. But today’s liturgy reminds us of a third, and for us most important presence of Jesus; his presence today through the community he established (the Church) and in each of us her members (the body of Christ).

In today’s gospel John the Baptist appears once again. Unlike our encounter with him in Advent and his call to personal and communal repentance to prepare for the

coming of Christ's historical birth, today's message alerts us to the presence of Jesus now. In each Mass as the invitation to share in the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion is extended to us we proclaim the words of John in today's gospel: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The same Jesus who was born in history and is the Lord of Glory is present for us now under the sign of the sacrament he himself gave us until he returns at the end of time. Our reception of Holy Communion is our physically saying "yes" to receiving and then being Christ in the world today. The prophet Isaiah in the second of the "Servant Songs" in the first reading speaks of the servant as one who is a "light to the nations." As those who have been "enlightened" by faith through baptism and sealed as God's "chosen ones" through the gift of the Spirit in confirmation, ours is the mission to en flesh the person of Christ in the world today. We are to be a "light to the nations." It is the commitment to lay down our lives in the service of in small and not so small ways: parents who lovingly sacrifice precious sleep to do the 2 a.m. feeding; the individual who chooses to take a stand and work for justice on the many life issues that are part of the social doctrine of the church even in the face of ridicule; or simply and profoundly, spouses, parents and children, priests and religious, friends and co-workers who day in and day out strive to bring the light of Christ with them wherever they go sometimes with nothing more than a smile, a reassuring word, a gesture of acceptance or forgiveness, a note or text or tweet of compassion, or a thousand other "little lights" which cumulatively can and do light the way in an often dark and violent world.

If such is our daily life, we need not fret, or wonder, over "end times" because we already dwell in the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.