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WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

Do you know anyone who actually expects the end of the world to come or the return of Jesus within six months? The readings at Mass at this time of the year focus on these themes. The Church clearly teaches that Christ will come again to judge the world. We read in the Catechism: “Since the Ascension, Christ’s coming in glory has been imminent, even though, ‘it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.’ This eschatological coming could be accomplished at any moment, even if both it and the final trial that will precede it are ‘delayed.’” (CCC #673). We even pray at Mass after the Our Father, “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

While we believe that, one day, the Lord will return, don’t we just go about our daily routines giving it little or no thought? So, what does this mean for us? Even if we don’t think about it all the time, the fact that we believe it means that we can live in hope. We are not stuck on an endless merry-go-round, with no purpose. There is an end point, a consummation, a goal, a final resting place. We actually experience this Advent hope all the time. Think about it. Every day we go about our lives, with good things and bad things happening, with stress and worry, but we know that eventually it all comes to an end (except for those who work overnight or are night owls!). At the end of day, we can escape from the pressures of the day. If we had a bad day, we can look forward to the gift of sleep at the end of the day, when we can close our eyes and put all that aside. Night time is a respite, a relief, albeit temporary. In the same way, each week we also look forward to the weekend. We know that eventually we will get to that point where we can, in a way, take a break from life, from the stresses of the week. Again, similarly, we do the same with vacations. It’s nice to know that at some point we can get away from it all, at least for a while.

Built into the normal rhythm of life are these end points, respites, times when we get off the merry-go-round. These, unfortunately, are temporary. Advent reminds us that there is an end point to which we are headed that is not temporary. If we have faith, we can even look on death as a gift. It is heart-wrenching, it is an ending, a separation, but it is also a release, a culmination, and a beginning of eternal life, an eternal break, an eternal respite, an eternal rest. Anticipating the Second Coming also gives us comfort. Regardless of whatever bad things happen, we have something to which we look forward to.

The images we read in Scripture about the end of the world are frightening. We must be careful not to focus on only half the message. The message is not destruction and endings, but completion, fulfillment and lasting peace. The bottom line, while it can be fun to take a ride on a merry-go-round, at some point we want to get off, not to just get on another ride, but to sit back and relax. Advent hope reminds us that this is exactly what God has planned for us.

“But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” (Luke 21:28)