

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on What Are We Waiting For?

Date: November 30, 2025

Sunday: First Sunday of Advent (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 24:37-44.

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Text: From the last paragraph of chapter 23 to the end of 25, Matthew explains the end of time. In that exposition, Matthew quotes Jesus's saying this strange line: "All these things are the beginning of the labor pains" (24:9). Matthew and Jesus were both male; Jesus was an only child and a bachelor. Matthew does not say who taught them about labor pains. But somehow, they became enlightened. Here is what Jesus called "the beginning of labor pains:" wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, hatred, evil and sin, and disciples letting their love grow cold. In addition, he tells of false prophets who play on fears by predicting the time for the end. Jesus says even He doesn't know the day or hour. Then, Jesus adds this: most of us will go about our routines oblivious to what is happening.

Jesus knows, however, after the labor pains, comes birth. Birth is about new beginnings, new opportunities, human potential. A World War II era philosopher Hannah Arendt—a female—gave the labor pains and the birth, a term. She called it *natality*. Natality is a remarkable human trait: it is the ability to begin anew, to change, to realize potential, to do the unexpected. Natality is making space for the next generation and welcoming the stranger—and opening our minds to their fresh ideas. Arendt was Jewish. But she thought the finest image of natality is the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus. She thought the greatest line evoking natality comes from Isaiah the prophet and often accompanies Jesus's birth: "For a child is born to us" (Isa 9:5).

I have not forgotten that I started this homily with a dark description of the end-time. To get back to it, I need to challenge our contemporary way of thinking. After centuries of magnificent scientific discoveries, we equate fact and truth. So, we look for facticity in these predictions. But truth is a bigger category than fact. We can convey truth through symbols and metaphors, in poetry and art, even in fiction. Matthew wrote in symbolic, evocative terms.

For Matthew the end-times actually began some fifty years before he wrote and some fifteen years after the events he weaves into his dark description of the end. The end-time began with the death and resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus died, the Temple sanctuary veil, a huge curtain, tore in two. The earth quaked, rocks split, tombs opened, and saints rose from the dead. And when Jesus rose from the dead, the earth quaked again, and an angel arrived from heaven; the resurrected saints walked into Jerusalem. The end-time began when Jesus died and rose again. Look how neat this symbolic construction is: death and resurrection, labor pains and beginning anew. The Lord's death and the labor pains give way to resurrection and new birth, to opportunity and potential.

Now, you ask, isn't Jesus expected to come in glory. Well, I take seriously Jesus's own assertion that we don't know. I do know we are using symbolic language, more like poetry than science. Here's what I am sure about. The last line of Matthew's Gospel is this: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (28:20). Matthew has no Ascension. Jesus remains with us always. We are participants in that truth. We know that Jesus is with us at Mass, in Word and Sacrament. The Catechism adds to that knowledge. Jesus is present in his Word, in the church's prayer, when two or three [reconcile] in his name, in the poor, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned (para. 1373). Meeting Jesus is not a future event. He is with us always.

So why are the dark times—wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, hatred, evil and sin, disciples letting their love grow cold, false prophets, and deadly routine—why are the dark times labor pains? At the end of chapter 25, Matthew tells us about Jesus coming in glory. Stay with me; he is present, and he comes again in glory: my friends, it's pure poetry. It's poetry that contains the truth of natality. Jesus is constantly breaking into our times with opportunities to be united to him. According to Matthew's poem, when Jesus comes, he divides all humankind into two parts. One part of the human family—perhaps you and me—one part knows Jesus; they met him, and they cared for him. Jesus is a hungry, thirsty person, a stranger, a naked, ill, or imprisoned person. Through our empathy, we meet the Lord. The other part of humankind did not care, showed no compassion, no empathy. They did not meet their Lord.

In this section of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says "stay awake" twice. And he says "be prepared" one other time. I've said this before: Because writing materials were rare, the evangelists meant it when they wrote something twice, much less three time. Here it is: Stay awake. We are in the end-times. We can meet the Lord right now. Let your *Amen* today mean you will meet Him here in the Eucharist, and later, in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the ill, the naked, and the imprisoned. As we live in compassion and empathy, we give birth to a new world.