

The Second Coming: When will Jesus come? What on earth will Jesus do?

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The Second Coming.... As I was preparing for this presentation, I quickly came to realize how big was the can of worms that I was opening. Let us just say: there are worms *everywhere!*

The Second Coming.... The Scriptures, of course, speak abundantly of Christ's return, of the "Second Coming"—as it has come to be called in our cultural context (in French-speaking circles, we generally speak of "the return of Christ"). Jesus speaks abundantly of His return, in the light of which all things ultimately make sense. But, as is always wonderfully the case, there is not single simple and clear discourse. Various things are said, which, of course, oblige much prayer and reflection, and have led to differing interpretations.

In the book of Revelation, for example, we read all sorts of things about the End Times and about the return of the Messiah, of Jesus—one might say *juicy* things, one might say *surrealistic* things. And so, I thought I would re-read the book of Revelation in preparation for this evening. As I did, I was humbled because I had the impression I did not understand a thing. I was also baffled, for the book begins by declaring that those who read it are blessed, that is, will experience God's happiness, and I was feeling was terror. And at times I wondered too what exactly John was doing in that cave on the island of Patmos where it is said he received the contents of the book. A wondrous example is Revelation 16:13-21:

I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. (sounds like what people were seeing at Woodstock)
These were demonic spirits who performed signs. They went to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty.

"Behold, I am coming like a thief." Blessed is the one who watches and keeps his clothes ready, so that he may not go naked and people see him exposed. (hmm: people with clothes;

does *not* sound like what people were seeing at Woodstock)

They then assembled the kings in the place that is named Armageddon in Hebrew.

The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air. A loud voice came from the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done."

Then there were lightning flashes, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. It was such a violent earthquake that there has never been one like it since the human race began on earth. The great city was split into three parts, and the gentile cities fell. But God remembered great Babylon, giving it the cup filled with the wine of his fury and wrath.

How is that for a happy note? Anyone interested in taking a break?!?

The Second Coming: a frightening event or a happy event?

The Second Coming: a mysterious "event" that will bring time to a close.

The Second Coming: a mysterious "event" that will definitively introduce humanity and the Cosmos into the divine life, into the reality of heaven, into the mystery of God. A happy event! The Second Coming, at which time will take place the "general judgment" as it is traditionally called: a basic tenet of the faith. Each and every Sunday, we proclaim our faith in this mystery: "He will come again (in glory) to judge the living and the dead, (and his kingdom will have no end)" [parentheses indicate Nicene Creed "additions" to the Apostles' Creed]. Each and every Sunday, we, in fact, beseech Jesus to come ("Christ will come again", "Until you come in glory", "Lord Jesus, come in glory"). Glory means with overflowing light and love. A happy event!

From the very Ascension of Christ, Christians have believed that He will return to bring His kingdom to completion, i.e. to "be all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). It seems that the early Church expected Jesus to return quite quickly. It seems that the early Church expected Jesus to return quite quickly, even though Saint Paul (in II Thessalonians 2) says, "**Do not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or be alarmed either by a "spirit," or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no one deceive you in any way**", and even though Jesus declared that the gospel of the kingdom would first be

preached throughout the world (Matthew 24:14). But, then again, who can blame the early Church for believing in a quick return? In the Book of Revelation, as its close, we read (22:20), **“The one who gives this testimony says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.”** In fact, two other times in the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, it is said, **“Behold I am coming soon.”** (22:7, 12)

Why the Second Coming? Because we have been made for God and God promises to embrace us and bring complete transfiguration in love, a transfiguration that only he can bring—albeit respectful of our freedom, and thus in cooperation with us. Frankly, our lives do not make complete sense outside the Second Coming. We are part of humanity that yearns for its completion, which Christ, if he is the God-man, alone fully brings. We are not meant to remain in the imperfection that is our current reality. Life is great, but it is not perfect (you may have noticed!). We are meant for perfection—the perfection of love, found in our Source, God, who is love. And those who are already “dead” at the Second Coming long for such perfection for their bodies.

There are *many* scriptural passages which refer to Christ’s return. There is one passage, however—in conjunction with a passage we will evoke later from I Thessalonians 4, that seems to have particularly caught the eye of many Christians (perhaps more Protestant eyes than Catholic eyes), a passage whose interpretation has led to diverse, even opposing views: Revelation 20.

Then I saw an angel come down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the abyss and a heavy chain.

He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil or Satan, and tied it up for a thousand years and threw it into the abyss, which he locked over it and sealed, so that it could no longer lead the nations astray until the thousand years are completed. After this, it is to be released for a short time.

Then I saw thrones; those who sat on them were entrusted with judgment. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image nor had accepted its mark on

their foreheads or hands. They came to life and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection.

The second death has no power over these; they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for (the) thousand years.

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison. (20:1-7)

It is a very mysterious passage that, upon deeper study, shows itself to be beyond literal interpretation, into which many have fallen over the centuries, and which we see today. It reveals something real but not in descriptive fashion; rather in a much deeper fashion. It is not a snapshot of the end times.

In this passage is mentioned a “thousand years”, a millennium, during which Satan is said to be “imprisoned”, and Christ to reign “in peace”. The “thousand years” have become particularly important in Fundamentalist Christian circles. Again, the Catholic Church reads this passage symbolically, which, dare I say, actually means with even graver importance, for it then applies to the universal Church in all ages. Literal interpretation seeks to unveil a description of “historical happenings”. Historical happenings are important, but they are not the focus in the book of Revelation. The deeper loving action of God that transcends (while taking hold of persons in) history is what is revealed.

With the Fundamentalist literal historical approach, the question of the Second Coming actually seems to become more complex. The Fundamentalist Christian perspective often includes a phenomenon called the “Rapture”, and is often portrayed as follows.

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From what I can gather, there are two basic schools of thought in Fundamentalist Christian circles regarding the Second Coming, the latter of

which seems to be more prevalent nowadays amongst: Post-Millennialism and Pre-millennialism.

- *Post*-Millennialism proposes that Christ will come after a thousand year age during which most of the world will become Christian. Little mention is made in this perspective of the what is called the Tribulation or what is called Armageddon (to which we shall return).
- *Pre*-millennialism proposes that Christ will come *before* a thousand year age during which he will reign. Many Fundamentalist Christians believe that this Second Coming (in which Jesus stays for a thousand years) will be preceded by seven years of Tribulation and Armageddon, all of which is triggered by the Rapture (which means that true Christians are, of course, spared the Tribulation and, therefore, suffering – because they have been raptured!).

Not all Fundamentalist Christians believe in the Rapture, but it is a prevalent belief. Keep an eye out for bumper-stickers and films (the “Left Behind” series...) and influential books (“The Late Great Planet Earth, 1970, by Hal Lindsay...) and websites: one of the most popular—1000 hits per day—www.raptureready.com, as well as other sites like www.raptureme.com, www.lookup.org, www.leftbehind.com, not to mention the site selling rapture-related fashion: www.rapturewearshop.com. Of course, there are Fundamentalist Christian sites that try to show the weaknesses of such doctrine, such as, www.leavingtherapturebehind.com. And, do not be confused by a few sites for musical groups who have adopted the name, although not for religious reasons: www.therapturemusic.com, a hip-hop band, and www.rapture.tk, a metal band from Finland.

It seems to me that the doctrine of Rapture, in essence, establishes *two* Second Comings (an obvious oxymoron—although “Rapturists” will claim that it is simply the Second Coming in stages): a coming of Christ to snatch all believers (but which does not really count because his feet will not touch the earth) and a coming of Christ at the end of the thousand years. Let me situate this simply by reading a passage from Rick Reinckens, whose website is www.godonthenet.net, articulates well what I believe is the predominant perspective in Fundamentalist Christian circles. Our purpose here is simply to approach the question of the Second Coming by contrast (and to know more what other perspectives exist). Amongst other things, I think the following perspective ignores the fact that Christ is present, that Christ comes at every moment, and is at work, and the fact that the Second

Coming will be the manifestation and completion of His *presence*, not the appearance after His absence. We will come back to this.

The Second Coming of Christ will occur in stages. First, He will remove all Christians from the Earth, to protect them. This is called the "**Rapture**." The term comes from the Latin verb *raptare*, and the Greek word *harpizo*, both meaning "to be caught" or "to be snatched." Jesus will "snatch us" out of harm's way.

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (I Thessalonians 4:15-17)

After The Rapture, God will begin executing judgments against unbelievers, during a period called the **Tribulation**. At the end of the Tribulation all nations will attack Israel, and Jesus Christ will physically return, leading the armies of heaven. At the Battle of Armageddon they will destroy everyone who is not a believer. Then Satan will be bound, and Jesus will establish the Millennial Kingdom, headquartered in Jerusalem. Jesus and the saints will rule over the nations of the Earth for a thousand years (**Millennium**). During this period there will be people born who are not loyal to Christ.

However, it usually will not be obvious. Therefore, at the end of the thousand-year period, God will release Satan and let him tempt those who inhabit the Earth. A large group will take up arms against the Lord and be defeated (**Armageddon**). Then, Christ will judge all who have ever lived, giving rewards to some and punishment to others.

Those who were "destroyed" will be cast into the Lake of Fire, i.e., Hell. After that, God will destroy heaven and Earth because they have been polluted by sin. He will create a new heaven and a new Earth, put those who were saved on the new Earth, and rule it forever (**Consummation of the Second Coming**).

Now, what is interesting to note—if I may (further!) deviate for a moment—is the mention made of the city of *Jerusalem*. The importance given to the

physical city of Jerusalem in this perspective very often includes (precisely for eschatological reasons) unusual support by many American Fundamentalist Christians for the State of Israel. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, for example, have been very supportive of the State of Israel throughout their careers, as is Trinity Broadcasting Network (you know, the woman with big strawberry blonde hair and big eyelashes). Those who adhere to the theological perspective of “Rapture-Tribulation-Millennium” have a very specific, rather unusual view of the Jewish people, their place in salvation history, and what God in store for them.

A doctrine called Dispensationalism has been developed articulating this. Those who espouse it, and consequently engage in active support of the State of Israel, and the rebuilding of the Temple, are what we call Christian Zionists. John Nelson Darby is considered by many to be the father of Dispensationalism. He developed it in the early 1800’s, in Ireland and England (a recent invention!), amongst Plymouth Brethren (and, therefore, not in a Christian context, i.e. *Sola Scriptura*, where the question, “Is it consonant with what has preceded?” is posed). It is based on a text from II Timothy 2:5, “Rightly divide the word of truth” (rendered, “Imparting the word of truth without deviation” in a Catholic translation). He developed a theology which claims that history consists of “dispensations” or “economies”, i.e. *periods of time* during which a different purpose of God is revealed, and humankind is tested differently, in a particular way.

When the Jewish people, for the most part, refused the Messiah, God established a parallel plan for them—which remains forever... Dispensationalism maintains a distinction between God’s plan for Israel, and God’s plan for Christians (and, through them, for the rest of humanity). The plan for Israel is that of an earthly kingdom. The (distinct) plan for Christians is that of the heavenly kingdom of which Christ speaks. The two being from God, however, means that one cannot be fulfilled without the other. For Christ to realize His kingdom, the Jewish people must be established in the Promised Land. The Jewish people must be in possession of Mount Zion (hence “Zionists”) and the Temple rebuilt. In this perspective, the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 is regarded as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and consequently certain political injustices can be overridden, such as the occupation of the West Bank in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note also that, in 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 3379 defining Zionism as, “a form of racism and racial discrimination”.

I am not qualified to articulate much on this topic, but suffice it to say that the perspective of the Catholic Church is much simpler and more realistic, and respects human reality. The Church respects the State of Israel, like she respects any other country—as a country—and she expects the State of Israel to act with the same respect. The State of Israel is to be distinguished from the Jewish faithful. The Jewish faithful transcend the State of Israel. Faith and politics, religion and the state are distinct. The founding of the State of Israel is not the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It is a political happening, an event in human history. God’s fidelity to the Chosen People is not expressed in the founding of the State of Israel, but at a deeper level in the hearts of those who have the same gift of faith as Abraham.

And so, in the midst of all this, Rapture, the Millennium, Mount Zion, what does the Catholic Church believe? One could ask quite simply, *prior* to all this, what had the Christian community believed, for almost 1800+ years? Christians believe in a Second Coming:

The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matthew 24:30).

Christians believe that Christ will come again, and, when He does, He will perfect all humanity and all Creation in Himself.

What do we believe? We do *not* believe in the Rapture, a doctrine that many trace back to a Presbyterian minister named Edward Irving, in London, in the 1820s. We do *not* believe in the so-called “Millennium” or “Millennarianism”, a doctrine which—much like what we saw regarding the belief that the founding of the State of Israel is the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy—does not sufficiently distinguish between the divine and the human, between what God does in the secrecy of human hearts, i.e. divine perfection, and purely human perfection. God fulfills us in Himself, by granting us a share in His transformative life, not by making us super-human, not by giving us a make-over. The Catechism states this in so many words:

Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him human history and indeed all creation are "set forth" and transcendentally fulfilled. (#668)

The symbolic, deeper Catholic understanding places our theological perspective above, beyond historical Millennialism. The thousand years are indeed understood symbolically (FYI: the thrones of the saints are *in the heavens*, not on earth). We are already in the “golden age”, the age of Christ, which is the final age. As stated, Christ is *present*: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” (Revelation 3:20) There are no different economies. There is *one gradual* economy, after the Fall, in which a chosen people is formed from a scattered, broken humanity, and this economy is completed, fulfilled, and surpassed in the new economy, the New Covenant in Christ—which itself will be brought to completion at the Second Coming. We are in the golden age, i.e. we participate, albeit largely in hidden fashion, in Christ’s victory. In other words, the love is deep within us. And it is the love deep within us that beckons the glorious, manifest return of Christ. In the Catechism, we read:

**Since the Ascension God's plan has entered into its fulfillment. We are already at "the last hour". "Already the final age of the world is with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way; it is even now anticipated in a certain real way, for the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real but imperfect. Christ's kingdom already manifests its presence through the miraculous signs that attend its proclamation by the Church.
... until all things are subjected to him (#670)**

When will Christ return? Paul (in Thessalonians 5:2) says that “**the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.**” In other words, being a renewal of all things, it precisely implies something *new*, and therefore, something greater, not in continuity with that which already exists (much like the New Covenant in comparison with the Old Covenant). It will not be the next logical step for the Cosmos. It is the next gratuitous step for divine love. In Mark 13:32, Jesus says, “**Of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son.**” What does this mean? How can Jesus Himself be clueless? Saint Thomas Aquinas says that “**The Son is said not to know insofar as He does not impart the knowledge to us.**” (Summa Theologica, Supplement, Q. 88, article 3, sed contra).

What is certain is that the Second Coming is beyond human grasp, and thus human speculation, and, therefore, that human speculation is a waste of time. Should we be reading the “signs of the times”? Or should we rather be faithfully and hopefully reading the presence of Christ? “If we are unfaithful he remains faithful” (faithfully present). The Scriptures speak of signs, but as Thomas Aquinas says,

The details mentioned in the Gospels and Epistles in connection with the last advent are not sufficient to enable us to determine the time of the judgment, for the trials that are foretold as announcing the proximity of Christ's coming occurred even at the time of the Early Church, in a degree sometimes more sometimes less marked. (Summa Theologica Supplement, Q. 88, article 3, reply 2)

Sigh of relief!!! We are not to be concerned with a cataclysmic event, but a Person whose presence we want to be complete. And so we beckon the Second Coming. We anticipate the Second Coming. Our focus should be on a faithful Presence, which will become manifest and definitively enkindle all things in divine love. Yet how easily we fear the Second Coming. How little we desire the Second Coming. Why? Perhaps because we are afraid of the unknown, and more specifically perhaps because we equate it with horrific events, such as those described in Mark 13:24, “**In those days after the Tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heave will be shaken.**”

Such occurrences (which are difficult to understand) are not the Second Coming, or those things that will accompany the Second Coming. What we read is a symbolic account of God’s purification of the earth in *preparation* of the Second Coming, which we must try to understand (because revealed) in conjunction with the truth that God is love and thus cannot directly cause suffering. We so often associate the Second Coming with suffering, outrageous suffering. We so often envision Christ really peeved, and equate the Second Coming with a painful major Spring Cleaning. God cannot directly cause suffering. God loves, and love purifies, and purification and the growth in love that it brings sometimes hurt. You may have noticed!

Based on the book of Revelation and Scripture passages such as these,

“Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many, and with the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold.” (Mt 24:12)

“The Day of the Lord can not happen until the Great Revolt has taken place.” (2 Thess. 2:3-4)

Christian Tradition has come to understand that there will be a great trial, a final trial, *preceding* the glorious advent of Christ, preceding the eschatological coming, the Second Coming. In the Catechism we read,

The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to descend from heaven. God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgement after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world.

These are two distinct “events” on our side of things. The trial *will entail suffering*— not *punitive* suffering caused by God, but the inevitable suffering that accompanies purification. Call it “growing pains”—to be distinguished from senseless, gratuitous pain. God cannot directly cause suffering. But God does purify. God does make room for love, for Himself who is love. You may have noticed!

It is indeed in the light of love that the End Times and the Second Coming are truly to be understood. Again, love purifies. Love purges of all that is not love, of all that refuses or burdens love. Purification is wrought by love, for the sake of love, that there only be love. And such purification is inevitable, if we are made for God who is love, and if there is not only love in our world, in our lives.

Thomas Aquinas says something very beautiful, but also very demanding, about the reality of love, which expresses well another aspect of the growing pains associated with love, “A lover is placed outside himself, and made to pass into the object of his love, inasmuch as he wills good to the beloved.” (Summa Theologica, Ia Q. 20, art. 2, respondeo 1). It sounds wonderful, understood romantically. It is disturbing, understood and lived realistically. Love uproots us, for it is about *another* person. When we love, the other person

goes first, and thus his/hers needs take priority. *That* is disturbing. Love always commits the crime of disturbance of the peace. Consequently, we do not always want love. We do not always want to let go, to expand and grow. So often, we are creatures of comfort, and we do not want our furniture re-arranged!

The presence of Jesus invites the ecstasy of love. Jesus' presence is disturbing, for it obliges us to change, to let go. Jesus' presence uproots us. Hence, the violence of some the reactions we find in Scripture. Jesus, however, does not come to disturb, to disrupt. Jesus simply comes to love; but his love obliges that anything contrary to love disappear. Jesus himself foreshadowed the effects of his advent in the cleansing of the temple. At the end of time, the presence of Jesus will fully *oblige* of everyone the ecstasy of love.

Thus, there will be a final trial—which is a purging by divine love, and prepares the advent of Christ, and the actual advent of Christ. The two, once again, as events are distinct for us. The final trial, although not the actual advent, although not the actual coming of Christ, is, in fact, *due* to his coming. There is a certain continuity between them. Indeed, Jesus has been coming ever since he “left”, i.e. ever since he withdrew his bodily presence. James says in chapter 5:8, in the present tense, “The Coming of the Lord is at hand.”

As mentioned, the Second Coming is more than an event, however. There will be a moment when His coming is manifest and completed, but it is more than an event. It is a mystery that has been occurring since the Ascension. How it will be *manifest* is another question... It does not necessarily mean *visible*, enthroned on clouds, etc. It means *known* by all. It can very well be interior. Saint Thomas Aquinas understands the clouds symbolically. He says, “**The cloud, on account of its refreshing influence, indicates the mercy of Christ.**” (Summa Theologica, Supplement, Q. 88, article 4, reply 3).

The final gift of divine love, the final taking hold of by Jesus, will not necessarily be desired by all. There will be some kicking and screaming! Why, if it is a mystery of love? Fear? Hardness? Complete self-absorption? And there is one who, with unique force, does not want the Second Coming, precisely because it is a mystery of love, the one who is anti-love: the devil. And the devil tries to breed an “anti” mind-set, which is essentially that of pride, whereby the self rules over all. But the *influence* of

the devil is limited: only that which God allows (the binding or imprisonment of Satan in Revelation 20 refers to this, not to literal complete restriction which would then make for absolute peace on Earth). And the *time* of the devil is limited, and he knows it: hence desperate rage.

This brings us to the question of the General Judgement. In the Catechism we read,

Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgement on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the world. He "acquired" this right by his cross. the Father has given "all judgement to the Son". Yet the Son did not come to judge, but to save and to give the life he has in himself.

Divine Government is very mysterious. God is in control. He has allowed evil. Whatever he allows can only and must be for a greater good. Now God cannot transgress human freedom, for love always presupposes freedom (One cannot force love). God cannot transgress our freedom to say “no”, but he can be almost irresistibly merciful, making it hard to say “no”. St. Paul’s mysterious words are amazingly hopeful, **“God has imprisoned all in their own disobedience, only to show mercy to all humankind.”** (Rom. 11:32) Love always triumphs.

The Church has never stated how many persons are in hell, for we know not what happens at the moment of a person’s death when they are encountered by mercy. God predestines no one to go to hell. This has been formally declared at two councils: Orange II (529) and Trent (1547). All persons are predestined to God, but are endowed with freedom as they journey home. Again, love presupposes freedom. Some of you may be thinking: “Well, if everyone gets to heaven, then why am I killing myself trying to get there.” I did not say, “Everyone gets to heaven.” I said, “We know not what happens, i.e. how the victory of mercy occurs in a particular soul, how God’s mercy affects a person upon death.” And it is true that the Church has been moving away from the belief that at death the verdict is read (as we often envision it...), and towards the belief that there is an encounter in which the individual has the opportunity to choose the One whose mercy envelops.

Jesus will return, and his return implies a judgment (cf. Matthew 25:31), that is to say, a *discernment* which follows his glorious presence, which is consequent to his glorious presence. Jesus’ return does not imply Jesus actively eliminating and discarding (like your cleaning of your basement).

The very presence of Christ, who is Light, will lay bare reality. In other words, to speak metaphorically, humanity will bask in God's light at Jesus' return – and implied therein will be an invitation to merciful cleansing which respects human freedom.

The Second Coming, which implies a judgment, a *discernment*, ushers in the fullness of the kingdom of God, for then Christ will definitively introduce into the life of God. The kingdom of God is the King reigning. At Christ's glorious return, He will reign completely, fully. Then the Church will truly and entirely be Herself, i.e. you and I will be purified by love to radiate glory, and only glory. In other words, we are destined to be gorgeous, to be the ultimate knock-out.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God).

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away."

The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."

He said to me, "They are accomplished. I (am) the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water.

The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son. Revelation 21:1-7

Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:5

To this we are called. This is our hope. We are to *expect* this, to long for this with joyful expectation, joyful anticipation. We are not to fear the Second Coming, for it is Jesus returning to give Himself to us gratuitously,

gloriously. Heaven is a free gift, not something we earn. We are to respond to the *gratuitousness* of the *gift*. It is infinitely greater to “work out our salvation” in response to love than out of fear. We seek heaven because we are loved, moved by love, not because we fear. We seek heaven not because we fear, for example, that what Gary Larson of Far Side says is true, i.e. Hell will be distraught persons going from one coffee-maker to another to discover that the coffee is always cold!. In fact, we love because we have been touched by the unmerited gift of heaven.

We are to long eagerly – with the whole of Creation.

For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God;

for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now;

and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:19-23

The whole universe will be transfigured by glory. This is *good* news. This is great news! We should be joyous. We should long each day. The Second Vatican Council stated: **“God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth, in which happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace in the hearts of men.”** We are speaking of a promise, a promise of love.

(Revelation 22:20) **“The One who guarantees these revelations repeats his promise: I shall indeed be with you soon.”** The Holy Spirit himself beckons this Second Coming, for it is the completion of Creation in love, or rather, the complete re-creation of us and our world, which is His work in our midst. The Church, moved by the Holy Spirit, also beckons this Second Coming. (Revelation 22:17) **“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’”**

If I may close with a few thoughts on Mary’s role in all of this. Mary, is, of course, as always, a very hidden figure. Why? Not because of unimportance, as a literal, simplistic interpretation would conclude. Because she is a secret of God, and she is hidden in Christ. I am leaning upon an interesting reading of the Book of Revelation by a brilliant French Dominican, Fr. Marie-Dominique Philippe (+2006). We read in Revelation chapter 14:

Then I looked and there was a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud one who looked like a son of man, with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.

Another angel came out of the temple, crying out in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Use your sickle and reap the harvest, for the time to reap has come, because the earth's harvest is fully ripe."

So the one who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven who also had a sharp sickle.

Then another angel (came) from the altar, (who) was in charge of the fire, and cried out in a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Use your sharp sickle and cut the clusters from the earth's vines, for its grapes are ripe."

So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and cut the earth's vintage. He threw it into the great wine press of God's fury.

The wine press was trodden outside the city and blood poured out of the wine press to the height of a horse's bridle for two hundred miles. (14:14-20)

Scripture seems to suggest that to Mary is entrusted fraternal charity, the love between brothers and sisters. **"Woman, behold your son."** (John 19:27) Jesus establishes a new bond that seemingly originates in Mary's heart: *"your son."* Such is the spring that wells to eternal life, of which Jesus speaks in John 4:14. Fraternal charity, brotherly love, if the same love that binds us to Jesus, is the overflow, the superabundant excess that glorifies the Father. It is the fruit that Jesus says we must bear (John 15).

Wine, suggesting celebration, symbolizes excess, overflow. Mary is linked to wine at the wedding feast at Cana. Mary is linked to the excess of love, to fraternal charity. Mary is given to us a mother, i.e. as guardian of love. A mother safeguards and promotes love.

It is interesting to note that it is an angel who harvests the vintage, not the one seated on the throne, someone to whom the task has been delegated. Now, there are several angels. But each one does not necessarily correspond to a person, but can correspond to a *role* played by a same person. Here, however, we have *another* "angel" ordering Jesus. Who can "order" Jesus to harvest the wheat? Is it not only Mary? Who can worthily, fittingly harvest the grapes? The one to whom what they symbolize is entrusted? We will be

judged on both our bond with the Father *and* our bond with one another. They are inseparable, and for both of them we are given victorious love. And Mary will be involved in the latter.

Mary indeed seems to be associated to judgment, as she was associated to the mystery of the Cross – out of a superabundance of love, not by necessity. What does that mean? It means the mercy of a mother....