

Homily  
33OrdC  
Nov. 12/13, 2016  
St. Bernard Church

Are we in the end times?

It seems to a lot of people that the world has been especially unstable in the last 20 years or so. Social changes, the decline in the influence of religion, the increase in terrorism, natural disasters and other factors, have caused many people to wonder if we are in the end times, the times described in the Bible which will take place just before the second coming of Christ.

Today's First Reading and Gospel give us some clues as to what will be the signs that the second coming is near: There will be-

- Impersonators of Jesus
- Wars and insurrections
- Powerful earthquakes, famines and plagues
- Awesome sights and mighty signs in the sky
- Persecution of believers in Christ

Saint Paul, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to Timothy, adds to all this his own very long list of clues to the end times. Here are a few of them:

- People will be self-centered
- Lovers of money and pleasure
- Making a pretense of religion but denying its power

The Bible, however, also says that before the end times, all of Israel will become Christian and the Gospel will have been proclaimed to all nations. Add to that, there is supposed to be an Anti-Christ. None of these has happened yet, so the end times are not likely to come anytime soon.

It is possible, though, that we could be entering a time of tribulation, a time of chastisement. This has been a consistent theme of our Blessed Mother in her approved appearances around the world in the last century.

This might be a good time to talk about one really big problem that has developed in the world over the last few centuries and is causing a lot of the problems that make people think the end times might be near.

We can call this problem the battle between relativism and realism.

Let's start with relativism. First of all, a definition.

Relativism is the concept that there is no absolute, objective truth, that truth is always subjective and depends upon individual values and perspectives, and that in fact we cannot know anything with certainty.

The idea that there is no objective truth is now deeply ingrained in our educational system and in common attitudes about issues like religion and moral values.

Here's an example: Do our laws protect the life of a 20-week old unborn child? Well, if there's a robbery, and the robber shoots at the mother and kills the child, the child is protected by our laws, and the robber is charged with the murder of the child. But, as we know all too well, the mother can have that same 20-week old unborn child killed by an abortion, and the child has no protection under our laws.

If truth is subjective, then our opinions can be lacking in logic or consistency. Not only that, but our decisions can more easily be based on emotions, on feelings, rather than on the exercise of our reason. We can be tempted to give in to impulses. After all, who is to judge, if there is no objective standard?

Relativism, subjective thinking, has become the popular approach in modern education, and it seems to get more extreme the farther you go in the educational process.

Here is the really scary thing about relativism. If logic and reason are not the basis for opinions, beliefs and laws, then ultimately education and persuasion have very limited influence and our society will be controlled almost entirely by force.

We've reached the point in our culture now where relativism leads to beliefs that are even contrary to science. Exhibit A would be the now widespread attitude that a person's gender is what they say it is, regardless of biological fact. It makes you wonder how far this will go.

Realism, on the other hand, is based upon the belief that truth is derived from the existence of things, and that there is Someone, with a capital S, or better yet, a G, behind the order and beauty in the world.

Realism is grounded in the Bible. In Romans 1:20, for example, St. Paul states:

Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made.

So we can learn about truth and the order that is to be followed in the universe by closely studying nature.

A related principle of realism is that all truth is integrated, that all things that are true fit together, that truth and beauty have a harmony that we can detect.

Here's one example.

At the University of Kansas in the 1970's, there was a curriculum called the Integrated Humanities Program. The format for each class in the program was for 3 professors to have a conversation in the front of the classroom. The students simply listened.

The professors talked about the truths that come from the existence of things, about nature, beauty, art, music, philosophy, science, history, literature, poetry and mathematics, and about how the truth in each of these disciplines was interconnected.

Many of the students were products of that time in history, hippies, for example, who were cynical about anything that was at all historical or traditional.

What was the impact of this program?

Well, even though religion was not directly promoted at all in the program, it is estimated that 200 of the students in this program converted to the Catholic faith. Many of them became priests and monks, and several of the monks who came out of that program make up the core of the community of Benedictine monks at Clear Creek Monastery in eastern Oklahoma.

These students, during a time of great unrest in our country, were so excited about what they learned in the KU program that it dramatically changed their lives.

What is especially sad is that there are very few academic programs in our colleges today which have anything in common with the Integrated Humanities program at KU. What we have instead is a situation where the fastest growing program on college campuses today is not an academic program at all – it's mental health services for the students. I think there is a definite connection.

My strongest hope is that all of us will find ways to spend less time on technology, less time on fantasy, and more time focused on the truly beautiful realities of life.

I want to close with this passage from the Book of Wisdom:

Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God,  
and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is,  
and from studying the works did not discern the artisan;  
Let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than the fire, or wind, or the swift air,  
or the circuit of the stars; for the original source of beauty fashioned them.  
Or if they were struck by their might and energy, let them realize from these things how  
much more powerful is the one who made them.