

*In those days the powers in the heavens will be shaken*

One wintry night my sister came through our kitchen door shouting: “The world is coming to an end!!” Being an older brother I reacted with visible skepticism. What can one expect of a skittish seven year-old? Nevertheless I went out into the dark to see what has happening – and began hyperventilating, for there were weird lights shooting in every direction up in the night sky – unrelenting, something I had never seen before in all my young years.

I later discovered it was the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights, which rarely came as far south as our Mason Dixon Line. A few years later when I resided in a school in Putnam County, New York, I witnessed the Northern Lights quite often during the winter months; got used to them – though still marveled at them.

In our Gospel reading for this Sunday of November – the season when night ever encroaches upon daylight, introducing the dark season of our year - the Church plays upon our expectation that our world can somehow go dark, come to end. It does so by confronting us each year with readings from Matthew, Mark and Luke that tell *of signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations . . . in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and waves . . . for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

And for the last century at least we know that we don’t have to wait for the end of time for our world to come – almost – to an end – what with two World Wars, the Cold War on the brink of a nuclear holocaust, upheavals generating migrations at a pace and level never known before, rapid technological growth that have changed neighborhoods and climate and expectations so radically within my own lifetime. So our liturgy says: this is a good time to think about impending change, even catastrophe, to wake up, snap out of our complacency, evaluate what our lives, our world are all about – and begin to live more deeply, genuinely, resolutely.

Nor does this Sunday’s Gospel reading end with brooding over impending doom, for it climaxes with a grand finale:- *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand-* In other words, light will return just about the time of the winter solstice – or better still, at Christmas – when Christ will be reborn as always, ready to lift us out of darkness, to illuminate our minds and hearts, our world – if we don’t choose to hibernate forever.

But what’s this about his coming upon the clouds in power and majesty? Pure hyperbole. That’s not how he will arrive at all. He will arrive as we did – not in a bassinet but even less noticeably in a manger, in a barn, among faceless shepherds and the aroma of farm animals – outside town.

God’s joke! Surprise. And what’s even funnier in a joyful sense, the birth of Christ is a reflection of your birth and mine. Each of us was born to be a savior of the world, a royal birth, born of the Holy Spirit. Didn’t you know that? Have you forgotten your baptism? Were you brainwashed too into believing you (and I mean *you*) could never be God’s Christmas gift to the world?