

The Second Coming of Christ

... then will appear the sign of the Son of man in Heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other. ~ Matthew 24:30-31

CHRIST WAS SENT into the world by the Father to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He announced the coming of God's reign that had been promised by the prophets of old and before ascending into Heaven he established a visible order and structure to it: the Church. The reality of the Kingdom continues in the Church, which has been given the same authority and power of Christ. While the Church is truly the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, it is only the beginning, the seed. The powers of sin and death were conquered by Christ on Calvary, definitively, but his Lordship has not yet been recognized by all, nor has his Kingdom come in its fullness. That is why we still pray "thy Kingdom come" (Mt 6:10) and "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rv 22:20).

Christ is coming back to subject all things to himself: "[E]very knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). His promised return will happen in the last days and will mark the end of time. Since Christ ascended into Heaven, we have been in the last days. While the Lord promised that there would be signs of his return, he also said, "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come" (Mk 13:33). Rather than becoming anxious about his return, the Lord asks us to be pre-



Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, by Fra Angelico, 1387-1455

pared, that is, to live the present day as if it were the day of the Lord's return.

One of the signs that Jesus prophesied would signal the last days is the appearance of "false Christs and false prophets" (see Mt 24:24) who will assault the Church one last time before his glorious return (see Mt 24:3-24). The Antichrist is not necessarily one individual but refers to anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 Jn v 7; see also 1 Jn 2:18-23).

The Second Coming should not make us fearful, because Christ has already won the victory. It is true that when he comes, the Final Judgment will take place, but like his first coming his return is also motivated by love. God the Father's love for his children is fully revealed in Christ both then, now, and forever. Even when he comes again, he still "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). If we repent and turn back to Christ even in the "eleventh hour" before the judgment, he will save us. The expectation of his coming is a constant reminder to be vigilant and call for conversion and ongoing conversion in our daily lives.

(CCC 668-679, 2771-2772, 2816-2818)

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