

**Homily for Mass for the 90th Anniversary of Catholic Charities
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**June 13, 2015
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, there have been some rumors in the news this past week that a large asteroid is on a collision course with the planet Earth and when it strikes in late September, it could result in massive destruction for humanity. While NASA experts have dismissed worries that our planet is in serious risk,¹ that has not stopped some from being convinced that this is finally the event that will bring about the end of the world.²

This story is just another installment in the seemingly never-ending predictions about how the world will come to an end. This idea of a so-called doomsday has captured the imagination of people for centuries. Even though all of these “prophecies” have proved to be false, people are still fascinated by the many ideas about how life-as-we-know-it here on earth will come to an end.

Even the early Christians had the idea that Christ, who had ascended to Heaven, would return very soon to usher in the Final Judgment and thus the end of this world. This resulted in a real sense of urgency on the part of the faithful so that they might be prepared for that unexpected moment when the Lord would come back.

Nearly two-thousand years later, we are still awaiting the return of our Lord in glory. Although the Church does not give much credence to these prophecies about the end of the world, such as this latest one involving a potentially destructive asteroid, she does acknowledge that we are indeed living in the end times. In fact, we have been in the end times since the time of the Incarnation. The Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ have brought about the definitive victory of life over sin and death, thus ushering in the New and final Covenant of God with man, a covenant which will find its total fulfillment when all the elect are gathered together in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It was Christ's desire that all people might come to the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel and so experience a share in this victory of salvation. It was to the Church that Christ entrusted this task of spreading that victory through the power of the Holy Spirit which was poured out on

the day of Pentecost, a feast we celebrated just a few weeks ago. This time, then, is the final phase in the Lord's plan to reconcile all of mankind back to Himself. Since this takes place through the Church, this end time is also called the time of the Church.

Our readings for today address that very topic of the Church. The first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel uses the image of a tree that starts out small, but will "put forth branches and bear fruit and become a majestic cedar." (Ezekiel 17:23). All of the species of birds, representing all of the people on earth, will be invited to come and "dwell in the shade of its branches" (Ezekiel 17:24), pointing to the safety and rest given to those who are invited to dwell in the Church.

The Gospel uses similar language when speaking about the Kingdom of God as having a small beginning, like that of a mustard seed, and growing to become large, inviting all to come and share in its shade. The Church has understood this passage to speak of her, for the Catholic Church is the "initial budding forth of that Kingdom" and "[w]hile it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King."³

These images which point to the growth of the Church reflect the desire of Jesus that His Kingdom not be limited to just a few, but offered to everybody. This is at the heart of the final instructions that He gave to His disciples before He ascended to Heaven, when He told them to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Some people who ascribe to end-time prophecies use them as a justification to turn in on themselves in fear, doing only that which is necessary for them to be ready for the Second Coming, cutting themselves off from the needs of others. This is totally opposed to the Christian approach to the end of time and how we should prepare for the Lord's return at the Final Judgment.

The Second Vatican Council, in her Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, states that “a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives.”⁴ In other words, the Council Fathers wanted to stress that the Church must take seriously the earthly duties entrusted to her by the Lord during this time of waiting.

We are to be good stewards of all that the Lord has entrusted to us, for a significant part of our judgment will be based on the stewardship that we practiced while in this life, as seen in passages such as the Parable of the Talents.

The Church has promoted the responsibility of taking care of our neighbor as a most eminent form of stewardship. Jesus speaks about this clearly and forcefully when He challenges us to recognize that “what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). Failure to provide for those who are in need among us can have significant consequences in eternity. As a result, the Church takes her responsibility to practice social outreach very seriously.

One of the ways in which the Church undertakes this work is through different organizations that have been set up to meet the various needs of humanity at the global, national, state, and local levels. One such organization that has been particularly active here in our diocese is Catholic Charities. For ninety years, Catholic Charities has been putting into practice the Gospel mandate to love God through our neighbors in need throughout central Illinois.

The services provided by Catholic Charities here in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois cover a broad range of needs. They meet some of the more traditional needs of providing food for the hungry through their Mobile Food Pantry, in addition to the nearly 200,000 hot meals served to the poor each year at St. John's Breadline here in Springfield.

Just as Jesus showed a special love for children, Catholic Charities offers various programs to aid the most vulnerable among us. They provide Post-Adoption services, in addition to operating the Catholic Children's Home in Alton. Catholic Charities also offers programs for the elderly who are at the other end of the age spectrum, in addition to every stage of life in between.

Recently, Catholic Charities also began offering legal assistance to those who are unable to pay for such services, but who find themselves in need of them due to the various circumstances in which they find themselves. In a society that has become so influenced and restricted by the legal system, these services are very much in line with the Church's care for the dignity of human beings and the rights that are due to them in justice.

These are but a few examples of the ways in which Catholic Charities has been a force for good and an instrument of God's love and mercy in our local Church. All of this has been made possible by the generosity of so many people, from our various benefactors and those of you in the pews who support Catholic Charities financially, to those who volunteer their time and skills to the various programs that they offer. The cooperation of so many working together toward this common goal of serving our brothers and sisters is a wonderful sign of vitality for our diocese and a concrete example of how we are already living lives of stewardship and discipleship.

It is my hope and prayer that Catholic Charities will continue to be an effective means of social outreach throughout our diocese, in addition to being a source of encouragement for all of the faithful to embrace more fully our call to be disciples of the Lord and generous stewards of God's many gifts for the building up of the Kingdom here in our diocese and throughout the world.

As we prepare to receive in the Eucharist the spiritual food that we need in order to continue to move along this path as we await the return of the Lord at the end of time, let us pray that we will make good use of the

time and gifts that we have received in order to spread the Good News of the Gospel in word and deed. If we commit ourselves to this way of life, we will have no fear of the unexpectedness of when we will be called to account for our stewardship at the end of our lives, for we joyfully look forward to completing our journey and hearing those welcoming words: “Well done, my good and faithful servant...Come, share your master's joy” (Matthew 25:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov/pdc15/>

² <http://www.inquisitr.com/1813936/asteroid-impact-apocalypse-2015-mass-anxiety-as-conspiracy-theorists-predict-catastrophe/>

³ *Lumen Gentium*, §5.

⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, §21.