

## ***First Sunday of Advent December 1, 2024***

*“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen, Come Lord Jesus!”  
(Revelation 22:20)*

Each year, as we begin the Advent season, the Church encourages us to look toward our ultimate destiny, meaning eternal life with God in Heaven. We are further encouraged to focus upon the last four things which will happen. These last four things have become known as Christian Eschatology. They are: (1) Death, (2) Judgment, (3) Heaven and (4) Hell. Many a minister will speak of the end times as a thing to be feared, but are they to be dreaded? Let us take this weekend to examine if this was the approach of the early Christian community and should it be our approach still today.

Let us begin by answering a question which was posed many, many years ago. What is the determining factor for one to move from paganism to Christianity? The answer which was given by those first Christians was Hope. This hope was found in the person of Jesus Christ whom they believed, as we still do, to be the Son of God who experienced His Paschal Mystery to offer all mankind a model of our own end.

God is the cause of our existence and the end to which we are all called. Jesus, as God’s sole begotten Son, provides us an example of how we should live as Christians. Early Christians interpreted their existence through His. A few years ago, a popular saying arose: WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? Without wrist bands, hats or shirts, these early Christians lived this principle daily. It was evident through their writings, actions and even in the way they prayed. Those earliest Christians would face East when they prayed joyfully waiting for Jesus to return as each new day dawned. Christians looked forward to this moment as it signified the fulfillment of everything they hoped for and lived for. I would be greeted by Jesus and live with Him for all eternity. This notion inspired certain Christians to assume the role of Church leaders - Bishops. Remember this was a different time then. To be a Bishop would mean an almost certain death. Yet, Christian men embraced this position as a good thing. Christian lay members would also shed their blood for this emerging Faith. To die a “Happy Death,” meaning to die free from all sin and be welcomed into God’s Kingdom by Jesus would be the most perfect of lives’ ends. Christians of these first centuries considered this the greatest event which could happen to their lives. For one to dwell in Heaven for all eternity with those you loved and who loved you, what is the downside to this?

Returning to our initial question, should we be afraid of the end times? If we return to the early Church, then our answer would be NO. We should not fear death and judgment IF we live as Jesus lived and modeled — to love God and neighbor as oneself. I think it rather comforting for us to return to this first Hope of the early Christians. If we see eternal life with God as something desirable, then we will be more likely to do those things necessary to make it a reality for us and those we love.