

over his creatures. By referring to himself with such solemn assurance, Jesus is pledging his whole person to his listeners as only God can.

The glorified Jesus' *I am with you* at the end of the Gospel and the implicit sway that promise exerts throughout the present discourse are God's ultimate, enfleshed answer to an anguished doubt and a pivotal query hurled by Israel to its Lord as far back as the exodus from Egypt: "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Ex 17:7). For Christians, the "exodus" now entails passing through the whole of life in this world, and entering the "promised land" will be their arrival in the unending divine Kingdom in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity.

Now, since the Father has made Jesus to be both our Way and our Life (Jn 14:6), it is more likely that the sun will lose its light and its heat and that the oceans will run dry and the stars fall from the sky than that Jesus will forsake us. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is 49:15), says the Lord Jesus to each of us.



24:3

εἰπὲ ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται  
καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας  
καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος;

*tell us, when will this be,  
and what will be the sign of your coming  
and of the close of the age?*

**F**OUR THEMES ARE HIGHLIGHTED in this initial portion of the eschatological discourse, as if Jesus were first listing all together the critical issues that he then intends to explore with his disciples in more detail. These four themes are: the parousia, or his own "Second Coming"; the end of the age; the violent rejection of

disciples by the world and internal scandals within the Church; and ephemeral kingdoms versus the lasting Kingdom.

In the Sermon on the Mount, at the other end of Matthew's Gospel, we saw how Jesus began teaching his followers the principles of a life of holiness with simple spontaneity, by allowing the fullness of his Heart to overflow onto their own minds and hearts. On the present occasion, however, although Jesus does invite conversation by sitting down with his disciples at leisure, it is they who initiate the discourse by asking him an earnest double question: "What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" Clearly, along their trek away from the temple to the Mount of Olives as they follow their resplendent Jesus, the disciples have been silently pondering the Master's recent words to the Pharisees ("You will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'", 23:39) and to themselves ("There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down", 24:2).

Prompted by the epiphany, the disciples have finally made the connection. Strikingly, they understand at last that it is indeed Jesus himself, their familiar companion and friend as well as the revered Master standing there before them in flesh and blood, who is the Blessed One "who enters in the name of the LORD" (Ps 118[117]:26). This all-important sacral formula, *Barúkh habbáh b<sup>e</sup>shém YHWH*, is drawn from the psalm of messianic acclamation par excellence:

בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בְּרַכְּנוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוּדָה

Blessed be he who comes in the name of the LORD!

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

It is a jubilant shout that concludes with a blessing for all future generations, shouted by the disciples with glee "from the house of the LORD", that is, from their existence within Jesus, the living Temple of God's Presence that Jesus himself has now become. It is crucially important for us to realize to what depth of Jesus' identity as divine Messiah his disciples have now penetrated.

As these now listen to Jesus' description of the exceedingly difficult times ahead, we would do well to unite ourselves to the attentive disciples in discerning in Jesus' voice more the trust-inspiring *basso profundo* of the divine Presence than the appalling details of impending catastrophes. In a similar way, no horrific detail of a fairytale told us by our mother when we were children (wolves devouring tender girls, for instance) could truly frighten us because such horrors were