

“Pray that you may have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent.”
Tidal waves, roaring of the sea, threatening signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, earthquakes. We usually try to keep these things at a distance from our consciousness. But sometimes things feel so foreboding we expect the worst and make movies like 2012.

I asked people what tribulations they were scared of. Airplanes, heights, losing a child, leaving children behind and no one to love them, incompetence, failing someone, snakes, being a burden to someone, aging and sinking into forgetfulness, the dark, the ocean, spiders, death. If it's silly to think tribulations will arrive next week or the world will end in 2012, it's just as silly to think tribulations will never happen. They have, they do, they will, leading up to the end of the world. Who wouldn't pray that we duck the bullet on this tribulation or that ... and who maybe wouldn't hope the end of the world is a long ways away and other people get to deal with it.

And yet, each Advent asks us to approach the thing differently. Pray for deliverance from evils --- yes --- but pray the world doesn't end for a long long time? Never.

What leads up to the ending of the world as it is may well be horrific, hairy, harrowing and horrible. But somehow all of that is a pittance to pay ... for Jesus to come again. He's with us now through the Holy Spirit, but not here in complete glory. When he comes in glory, to a drastically re-constructed heaven and earth, we'll all be so grateful we'll say: Oh why why Lord didn't you come sooner!

Pastor Steve Brown describes a car he saw. (“Dynamic Preaching,” XV, 4, p. 62) It wasn't ugly --- it was ugly on top of ugly. A large gash on its side; one of the doors was held together with baling wire, several other body parts rusted out. The car's loose muffler banged on the street at every bump, sending out sprays of sparks. The original color: you couldn't tell, rust had taken off so much of the paint, it had been re-painted so much any color of the rainbow might have been the original. But the most impressive thing about the car was the bumper sticker. It said: This is not an abandoned car.

That's you. That me. That's the world. The tribulations will come, we why lie --- we are bound to get awfully beat up. The original paint may not be recognizable. But we're not abandoned. All this stuff just means Jesus is getting closer.

What will it be like? Maybe something like when hugely popular King Hussein returned to Jordan after cancer treatment at Mayo clinic. (“Dynamic Preaching, *ibid*, 64) All of Jordan grieved the 6 months he was away. And Jordan turned up to welcome him home. Bedouin tribesmen slaughtered sheep and camels along the roadsides to offer thanks. Shopkeepers gave out spiced coffee and sweets. The royal family wept openly. A million people, one third of the country, gathered along streets and in public squares to cry, cheer and rejoice as speakers everywhere blared out “Hamshi, Hashmi,” a popular song praising the king's family. “Whatever we do, it will not be enough to express our love and respect to the king,” one housewife said. “Your return home is like the return of the soul to the body,” beamed a large banner.

When Jesus comes, it will be like that ... times a million. The dead will rise. Sin and dark will be done. Crying, dancing, cheering. I'll be there for that. So will you. He will be the full return of the soul to the body. So no wonder, tribulations or not, we and our Catholic Church say all Advent: COME LORD JESUS. COME LORD JESUS. COME LORD JESUS.