

Are we in the End Times?

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Are we in the end times? This is a question asked by many observers of the sad state of the world. As Orthodox Christians we believe that the Lord "shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end."¹ But when? God became man in time, and He will come again in time. We must not be deceived, we must prepare ourselves for this coming, first by discerning when the end will come.

Not long before the Saving Passion of the Lord, His disciples asked Him this same question. "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"² The Lord began His answer with a warning: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."³ This is the first sign of the end, a sign which began at the coming of Christ with many, including Simon the Magician, and has continued to this very day.

Saint John the Theologian warned his flock of the dangers of false christs in his first Epistle, saying "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time."⁴ Saint Paul taught that these antichrists have come to reveal the True Church, saying "I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."⁵ Those who teach heresy teach a false Christ, as they do not believe in Christ, rather they reject Him in favor of their own imaginations concerning Him. It is in the face of these heretics that the Holy Fathers, faithful to Christ and His teaching, have arisen to defend the Orthodox faith and reveal to us the path of salvation.

He then gave them a second sign to watch for, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars... nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in diverse places."⁶ Again, these were happening at the time of Christ, and are certainly present today. But the Lord tells His disciples that "all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet... All these are the beginning of sorrows."⁷ These are signs of the end, but not the end itself. They serve rather as reminders that this world will pass away, but the words of Christ will never pass away (Matt. 24:35). We must, then, allow these events to cultivate within us repentance and vigilance over ourselves, that we may be ready to meet the Lord at all times.

Once these signs have come, the Lord tells us that His disciples will be persecuted and hated by the nations, that there will be betrayal, and there will arise many false prophets. Again, this has all happened from the time Christ spoke these things until now. The blood of the

¹ Symbol of Faith

² Matthew 24:3

³ Matthew 24:4-5

⁴ 1 John 2:18

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:18-19

⁶ Matthew 24:6-7

⁷ Matthew 24:6,8

martyrs has soaked every nation where Christianity has been proclaimed, the disobedient have caused schisms from the Church of Christ, and false prophets have arisen with various degrees of success, be it Muhammed, Joseph Smith, or the lesser known deceivers.⁸ These signs of the times have been clearly seen since Christ ascended into Heaven.

One of the greatest examples we have of this in our own days is the witness of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. Having rebelled against the godly Tsar, the Bolsheviks unleashed an era of godlessness in a once Orthodox nation, killing all who professed true faith in Christ. In the midst of this there arose the so-called "Living Church," a schismatic movement that sought to introduce every manner of sacrilege into the Orthodox Church, with the blessing and support of the Soviet regime. Despite all of this, the Church survived, and now looks to the New Martyrs as holy guides in our own era of godlessness.

All of these signs are cultivators of iniquity, which the Lord said would produce a cooling of love, "but he that shall endure to the end shall be saved." Those who endure to the end will proclaim the Gospel of Christ and spread this good news throughout the world in spite of these signs, then shall the end come.⁹ So are we in the end times? All of the signs that the Lord warned His apostles of are present in our days, as they have been since the day the Lord spoke them. We are indeed in the end times, and have been since the End became Man in Bethlehem.

In the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, the Lord says "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."¹⁰ Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made."¹¹ He is the beginning because He is the Creator, He is before "when" itself. He is the end because He has become man to destroy death, that sorry state which has separated us from God. He is the end of sorrow, of pain, of sighing, of every wound we have taken upon ourselves in our rebellion against the Giver of Life. He told His disciples this when He said, after the Gospel is preached everywhere, "then shall the end come."¹² This end is that glorious day when Christ "shall come again to judge the living and the dead,"¹³ and His enemies shall be made His footstool.¹⁴ Christ is the end that shall come, Who shall put an end to all that has kept us from Him.

Man was created for union with God. Wisdom of Solomon says that "God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it."¹⁵ Man was not created to die, he was created to live life through union with God, the source of Life. But we have fallen astray, going the way of the devil by rebelling from God. We have thus taken upon ourselves death, and all the pain and suffering that comes along with rebelling from the good.

God, the lover of mankind, did not wish for men to die, but rather that they turn and live. He therefore "takes to himself a body capable of death, in order that it, participating in the Word

⁸ Matthew 24:9-11

⁹ Matthew 24:12-14

¹⁰ Revelation 1:8

¹¹ John 1:3

¹² Matthew 24:14

¹³ Symbol of Faith

¹⁴ Psalm 110:1

¹⁵ Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24

who is above all, might be sufficient for death on behalf of all, and through the indwelling Word would remain incorruptible, and so corruption might henceforth cease from all by the grace of the resurrection."¹⁶ Christ is the beginning of our life and the end of our sorrows, for it is through His saving work that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall be there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."¹⁷ The Incarnation is the beginning of the End, which will "make all things new."¹⁸

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, the disciple of St. John the Theologian wrote, saying "these are the last times. Therefore, let us be reverent; let us fear the patience of God, lest it become a judgment against us. For let us either fear the wrath to come or love the grace that is present, one of the two; only let us be found in Christ Jesus, which leads to true life."¹⁹ In order for us to either fear the wrath to come or love the grace that is present, we must heed the call of our Savior, the beginning and the end, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"²⁰

The kingdom is at hand because the End has become Incarnate and proclaimed it. Let us therefore prepare ourselves to meet Him in the cave, where the King no one was prepared for came into the world. The Kingdom is nigh, for "the kingdom of God is within you."²¹ The end is nigh, and the kingdom is within our grasp. We must make haste to seize it!

¹⁶ Fr. John Behr, trans. Saint Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Yonkers, NY. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 58.

¹⁷ Revelation 21:4

¹⁸ Revelation 21:5

¹⁹ Michael W. Holmes, trans. *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academic, 2007), 193.

²⁰ Matthew 4:17

²¹ Luke 17:21