As you look around you today you see the beautiful church that was built by the founding parishioners of St. Andrew the Apostle. The days are coming when it will be totally destroyed! Think about this for a moment and you will have some idea at how shocking Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple was in 33 AD. There was no way to know at the time, but in 70 AD, less than 40 years after Jesus’ prediction, the Jerusalem Temple was totally destroyed along with much of Jerusalem. Later in this passage Jesus will also speak of cosmic disasters that will be the prelude to the coming of the Son of Man. This time at the end of our liturgical year our readings will focus on the end times and final judgement.

As frightening as the thought of the end of the world is, Jesus’ message is that we must resolve to not be terrified by these horrifying predictions. There will always be con men who will use fear to lead us down the wrong path for their own purpose and gain. Fear is a
powerful motivator, but if we allow ourselves to be subject to it we will easily resort to violence. Fear comes in many forms; fear of the unknown, fear of the stranger, fear of death, fear of losing our freedom or our possessions. As Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O. once said, “the root of war is fear.” Jesus asks us to welcome the stranger, to share our possessions, and to love our enemies. The early Christian community transformed the world, because they were known by the love they had for the other. Thomas Merton echoed Jesus when he said, “Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.”

There are many pressures in the world that would want us to capitulate with the powers to be, just like the Jewish leaders 2,000 years ago. We must not trade our values, any of them, for political expediency. Pope Francis, in his book, On Heaven and Earth, stated: “There are those that seek to compromise their faith for political alliances or for a worldly spirituality… Henri de Lubac, says that the worst that can happen to those that are anointed and called to service, is that they live with the criteria of the world instead of the criteria that the Lord commands from the tablets of the law and the Gospel.” This is what troubled the faithful Jews that Jesus tried to reassure with his message in today’s Gospel passage.

The Temple officials and Jewish leaders had collaborated with their Roman occupiers in an effort to protect their positions and maintain their life style. Herod the Great who was despised by the common man was responsible for the rebuilding of the Temple, returning it to its former glory during the time of King Solomon. Jesus points out that the Kingdom of God is not about a man-made temple built on the backs of the faithful Jewish peasant class, but God’s Temple within. Keep in mind that at the time of Jesus 80% of Jerusalem’s economy was based on the Temple. The raising of animals for sacrifice, the selling of these animals, the slaughtering of these animals, and the distribution of the meat. And guess who got the lion’s share of the meat. This is not to say that we don’t need places of worship, only that we must not lose sight of the big picture and trade away our everlasting glory for short-term gains.

“Do not be deceived,” or let people convince you that in order to uphold the sanctity of life of the child in the womb, we must ignore the stranger in our midst, affordable healthcare, the right to a living wage, or the poor on our streets. In the Gospel Jesus commands, “Do not follow them!” St. Andrew parish has a legacy, not just for a beautiful church building, but also a heart for the poor and the orphan. Let's not lose sight of these admirable values we hold in this community of faith, when we walk out into the secular world and into the political arena. This is part of what I believe Jesus was trying to get across with his discourse in today’s Gospel. Sure the Temple is important, but don’t neglect the needs of the common man in your efforts to adorn the Temple. The earthly Temple will pass away, but human lives need to be upheld, who are themselves the true Temple of the Lord. The earth too will pass away, as will all the inhabitants, but there will be a new Heaven and a New Earth, where all of creation will be restored. Until then…

So what are we to do in the mean time? Jesus is clear when he speaks of the coming calamities. He doesn’t mince words; it will be the most difficult time of persecution and the attacking of personal and religious liberties. For our part Jesus tells us not to fear, he says, “do not be terrified.” We must resolve to persevere so that we will secure our lives. (cf Luke 21:19) … but I get ahead of myself – the end of the world cannot be predicted, but we do live in dangerous times even today. So we will need the same endurance and perseverance that will be required at the end-time and be ready to speak the truth. Gladly we do not need to prepare what we are to say beforehand, for Christ will give us the wisdom to speak the truth, that will
dumbfound our adversaries. One of the temptations during the times when our faith is challenged is to resort to violence in our attempts to change society – this we must resist, because the only way to change hearts is by love.