

### THE END

In these last weeks of the Church's liturgical year, as Nature undergoes the dying process of autumn before the long sleep of winter, the Liturgy invites us to ponder the Last Things, traditionally four, death, judgment, heaven and hell, although in reality there are other Things to consider too: Purgatory, the theory of Limbo, the Particular and the General Judgments, the Intermediate State, the Second Coming of the Lord, the end of the world, the resurrection of the body, the dawn of the Kingdom, the New Heaven and the New Earth. All these Last Things, the Church, at this time of the year, presents for our consideration.

Indeed in today's 1stR, Archangel Michael reveals to Daniel that after the Persian wars, God will vindicate the just in a resurrection from the dead. And in the Gospel's apocalyptic language, Jesus speaks about the end of time, when people will SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING IN THE CLOUDS WITH GREAT POWER AND GLORY. When this will be, no one knows but God alone. God is the Ground of Being; existence depends on him. The End could be at any moment. But even in the natural order, astronomers say our Sun only has a life-span of 10B years. It's now 4½B years old and in 1½B years, it will start to burn out and go supernova. And that really will be it: the End! --Because everything from Mercury to Jupiter will be engulfed. But let's bring this home to you and me. Because one day, relatively soon, we're going to die and as far as you and I are concerned that will be the end of the world as we know it. And that's the point! For as the Acclamation said, we must STAY AWAKE AND STAND READY.

A few summers ago on holiday in Scotland, I visited a Woolen Mill and I saw a woman, using traditional machinery, weaving a tapestry. Because she was sewing from the back, you could only see random stitches and coloured patches; you couldn't work out what the tapestry was. I asked her for a quick look. When she turned it round, I was amazed: it was Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper! It will be like that when we die and come before God. The tapestry of our life will be turned round and we will see things as they really are: all the good we did by God's grace, and also all our sins and flaws, including those we still need to repent of. This is why the Church at this time of the year presents us with the Last Things. She does so, not to frighten us, but to give us hope, to encourage us to persevere in our faith and loyalty to Christ. It's not for us to speculate about times and places, but to remember that one day my life will end. I will have to stand before the Lord and give an account. And I need to think about this every day, and to prepare for it well, by imitating Christ, by living a just and holy life here and now, by prayer and receiving the sacraments, especially regular confession.

HOLY MARY MOTHER OF GOD PRAY FOR US SINNERS NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH. Life today is phenomenally busy. It's easy to get caught up, to take our eye off the ball, to horizontalise my life, to neglect the backcloth of eternity against which we live. To be a Catholic means to be counter-cultural, to swim against the tide. So in this Mass, let us pray for the grace of a holy death. Let us pray to persevere in the practice of our faith. Let us pray for the grace to live each day as if it were our last. And when one day the Lord summons us before him, and the tapestry of our lives is turned round, may the Blessed Virgin pray for us and St. Michael defend us, that we be found worthy of the promises of Christ and the love, joy and happiness that streams from His Heart in Paradise.