

There were many terrible things about World War II, and one of them was the devastation of cities- the destruction of communities of persons who were not involved in any real way in the conflict, but just happened to live their lives in these cities.

Manila, Warsaw, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Palermo, London, Liverpool, Berlin, Dresden- the list goes on. Countless lives lost and infrastructure and buildings of all kinds destroyed- not a stone left upon another stone. And it goes without saying that both sides were just as guilty for this, and that of course does not excuse it.

But even with all that unspeakable tragedy, all these cities were able to rise from the ashes- they have all been resurrected and are alive once more, some even more dynamic and impressive than before. Not that what happened during the war will ever be forgotten- and it should never be- but the good people of those cities were able to move on and rebuild and find new life and reimagine their future. The end was not the end.

So when Jesus predicted how the Temple would be in ruins and that Jerusalem would be destroyed and it seemed as if the end was near, He didn't necessarily mean that the end was the end, if you get me. God got the people through the dark times- He never abandoned his people and there was always that sense of hope that they can- with God's help- rise above it all and start again. God never abandons his people even when it looks like the end. Because with God there is no end- there are always chances to start again- with God there are always beginnings.

Which gives us hope in the face of so many difficulties all around us- in our personal lives and in our communities and in our nation and in our world- all the things that make us think sometimes that the end is here, and which so easily distracts us from the all the good and holy

and wonderful things that are in our life and in our communities and our nation and our world. And which I dare say greatly outnumbers the bad stuff.

Life is so incredibly precious- fragile and unpredictable and rich with meaning- and it shouldn't take a tragedy or a shakeup in one's life to make us realize that. Too often and for too many of us, life goes by in a blur- we hardly even know what we're doing half the time because we're worrying about everything and we're running around trying to accomplish more things than we ever would have thought possible when we were younger- and that applies to retired persons as well.

When we meet the Lord- whether it's at the end of the world or at own end- we will present to Him how we lived the life that was entrusted to us and when the Lord asks us how we spent our days, are we going to answer: *"Well, I worked like a madman and I was exhausted all the time and I had no time to enjoy life- to be with my family and my friends and to laugh and to enjoy the many, many good things of life that were right in front of me"*?

The Lord will not be impressed- He's not impressed by what we do and all the projects we're part of and how exhausted we can get. The Lord will be impressed- He will be joyful beyond belief- if we just were able to love.

Yes, while we're here on this earth we have to work and we have to be responsible for many things and we have to take care of ourselves and our families and our community, but if we don't slow down and just be present to the many, many good things and people all around us- if we don't take the opportunity to simply love the good things we have and the wonderful people we share our lives with- then we're living as if we're never going to die and life becomes a chore and a burden- and not the precious treasure that it is and that we need it to be.

Today's Gospel was not meant to scare us- what's the good in that, for ourselves or for the Lord? It's meant to remind us that the end will come and that we will be challenged as the end comes near but to not let that overwhelm us or take us away from the life that is ours here and now. The Lord will be with us every step of the way, as He always has been, and He will take care of us.

Live every day with that awareness that every moment of life is a gift from the Lord. Worry about what you have to worry about, but until the end, savor the good things of life and share them with the people you love.