

Mini-Series: “Discerning the Signs of the Times  
The Trials and Triumph to Come”

God willing, in this 5-week Mini-Series, based on the sound foundations of Scripture, the Catechism, and the Teaching of the Popes and of Mary, Queen of Peace, we will spend the first four weeks identifying the various **Trials** which Our Lord has told us to expect, and the last week celebrating what we know about the **Triumph** that is at hand.

Among contemporary Catholic authors and scholars whom I have found particularly helpful in organizing this material are Dr. Kelly Bowring, Rev. Dr. Joseph Iannuzzi, and Evangelist Mark Mallett, plus a host of others on individual aspects of our theme. I have met all three of these theologians and have had in-depth conversations with the first two.

This whole series is an exercise in building **faith** based on God’s trustworthiness, **hope** based on the bright outlook God is giving us for the immediate future, and **love** based on God’s constant efforts to reach us in our own time and place through the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

We will take a few minutes right now to establish this basis.

After describing to His followers in some detail the very trials we will be considering over the next four weeks, as well as the terror and panic these events will inspire in those who are unprepared and whom they will overtake by surprise, Jesus says to them and to us (Luke 21:28):

*“Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

Even the famous love passage from 1 John 4:17-19 is set in the context of the approaching Day of Judgment:

*“In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the Day of Judgment, because as He is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us.”*

Mirjana, whose special charism is praying for unbelievers, says that no one has anything to fear who knows God’s love and who loves and trusts in Jesus and welcomes the messages which He sends to us through Mary, whereas, she stresses, we need to pray fervently for those who turn away from God in unbelief because “they do not know what awaits them.” Mary said much the same thing at Fatima nearly a century ago. And both Jesus and Mary told St. Faustina in the 1930’s that the world has entered the End Times.

We’ll conclude this Introduction by paraphrasing a recent article from “Medjugorje Today” to highlight the joy and hope that God has laid up for us especially in these times.

Why would the visionaries who know so much about what is coming on the earth want to have children? In fact, they all have children, well over 20 kids, including the 2 locutionists. Mirjana in fact says the Blessed Mother told her not to be afraid to have children. “You should be more afraid NOT to have any. The more children you have, the better.” Mirjana went on to say, “I know why She said that, but I can’t tell you more. Only this: when the secrets are revealed, people will understand why it was so

important for them to have many children. We are all waiting for the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” (Medjugorje, The 90’s, Sr. Emmanuel)

Think of that statement for a minute, and take heart. The Day is close.

All of the sound foundational teachers mentioned above alert us to certain “trials” that in some ways are the Church’s permanent lot on earth, the price we pay for being the Body of Christ, if you will, in a rebellious world. But these teachers are all insistent that as we approach the close of the age, these trials will become exponentially more intense and wide-spread.

What exactly are they? In the order in which we will consider them, they are:

- “Apostasy and Lawlessness”,  
as lukewarm Christians forsake God.
- “Global Totalitarianism and Global Commerce”,  
forcing everyone to conform in order to survive.
- “False Prophets”,  
who take distorting the Truth to new levels of deception.
- “Global Persecution of the Church”,  
making martyrs of believers in Jesus world-wide.

Coupled with natural disasters of unprecedented scope, these are the very things Jesus was talking about when He said:

*“When you see **these things** beginning to take place, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

## Apostasy

What does “apostasy” mean?

In the Greek language, apostasy means literally “a falling away” or “a defection”. It was most frequently used in ancient times to refer to “a rebellion within the ranks of the military”, that is, “an uprising caused by soldiers who refuse to obey their commander”. “Treason” is another word for it. An individual soldier might “apostatize”, or an entire regiment. It involves your wholesale desertion from your prior commitment, personally or as a group.

The Rev. Dr. K. Glen Johnson, for 28 years President of Camrose Lutheran College, later Augustana University College, looking at the state of the Lutheran Church of which I was a bishop, once told me: “If we had the slightest notion of the degree to which we have apostatized, we would be appalled.”

If we had any idea of the extent to which we have deserted Our Lord....

**Unprecedented** apostasy is a primary sign that the end is at hand. We find this in Jesus’ teaching, in the teaching of St. Paul and St. John, and in the Apocalypse (Revelation) to John. Today we want to underscore the simple FACT of it: we will take a closer look at the causes of it in the next 3 weeks as we consider the impact of the other trials on the Church and on half-hearted believers.

Jesus told a parable one time that sums it up perfectly. It says almost everything we need to know about apostasy, including the fact that there

is no justification for it. Jesus sees it coming and just shakes His head in dismay that we don't "get it". Here's the parable:

[*Read Luke 18:1-8*]

“NEVERTHELESS, when the Son of Man comes, **will He find faith on earth?**” This is End Times. This is wholesale apostasy. And it's tragic and so unnecessary.

In Matthew 24 Jesus points out that apostasy will be a factor in the Church's experience in every age, like the seed which falls on rocky ground, springs up quickly, and dies off in the heat of the day “when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word” (Matt.13:21). That can happen any time (Matt.24:4-6, 9-13), but when this age will have played out its hand to the last card, the falling away will be massive because the trials will be unprecedented (Matt.24: 21-25):

*“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be again. And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you beforehand....”*

“Yes, Lord. We are listening.”

St. Paul is not less aware of the great Apostasy which will usher in the close of the age. This is all the more amazing because there was nothing in his personal experience to suggest such a thing. This was the period of

great missionary expansion, “making disciples of all nations”. In the full bloom and evident wide-spread success which the Gospel was having in reaching and liberating people everywhere through their Baptism into Jesus and His death and resurrection, in the full flower of great Gospel victories, Paul writes these words to the believers in Thessalonica in Greece, a passage which I will cite in its entirety:

*[Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12]*

Here we learn that one person – St. John calls him the antichrist (I John 2:18), St Paul calls him the God-pretender, Revelation calls him the blasphemous Beast that demands universal worship and sucks almost everyone into slavery to satan – one person will arise just before the end who will gather up into himself all the strands of apostasy which have occurred throughout history. We will explore this in more detail in weeks to come. But here we note that in the face of overwhelming pressures, all who are not well established in Christ will cave in, desert the faith, go over to the enemy, and appear to be the winners for it. Apostasy, in its many forms, will seem like the way to go for all who are not firmly grounded in the truth of Jesus.

(Here, I might add, is perhaps the greatest gift Mary brings to us in these confusing times: She brings us Her Son as He really is, not some watered-down, made-over version of Jesus offered to us both arrogantly and sometimes ignorantly by the popular antichrists of our time, some of whom pass themselves off as learned theologians. That’s why I continually say that Mother Mary is my favorite theologian. Her Jesus is the real Jesus. We can count on that!)

One other passage from St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy is well worth citing at this point because it clearly refers to the End Times and it seems like an almost blow-by-blow account of modern secular life, devoid of the tempering influence of Christian values. It also gives a terse description of what "churches" morph into when they choose to apostatize rather than remain true to the Lord in such an environment.

*[Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7]*

The remainder of this Chapter, and the first 5 verses of Chapter 4, offer a superb and very timely summary of what it takes for the Church and its faithful to remain on track with God when so many are deserting the Faith. This passage was life itself to me as a teenager, and also to many of my friends.

And who can forget St. Peter's words of warning which we will have occasion to examine later in depth?

*[Read snatches of 2 Peter 3:1-13]*

There are a many more passages of Sacred Scripture which we might cite, but they serve only to reinforce the point we have already made: **We can expect a major falling away from the Faith as the present age nears its end.** The trials that accompany this defection, corresponding at least in some measure to the Medjugorje secrets soon to be revealed, are both punitive and remedial. That is, they are a punishment for allowing Sin and Satan to define us so thoroughly, and they are a corrective to draw us prodigal sons and daughters back to God. They are simply the result of God's giving us up to the logical consequences of our own poor choices in life, and they are redemptive,

offering us one last chance to repent, to turn our apostasy around, to rejoin the ranks of the faithful through the one final offer of amnesty from the heart of God.

It remains for us now only to nail all this down through the concise teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a few of the pertinent teachings of the Popes who occupy the Chair of Peter.

In the section of the Catechism dealing with the Creed, under the heading: “From thence He will come again to judge the living and the dead,” we find three paragraphs entitled “**The Church’s Ultimate Trial**”. It begins exactly where we have begun:

*675 Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers .The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the ‘mystery of iniquity’ in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth....*

The rest of these paragraphs in the Catechism enumerates the other trials which we will be looking at more closely in the weeks to come.

As for the Popes, we start with Pope St. Pius X at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century who wrote in his encyclical, *E Supremi*, dealing with “The Restoration of All Things in Christ”:

*Who can fail to see that society is in the present time, more than in any past age, suffering from a terrible and deeply-rooted malady which, developing every day and eating into its inmost being, is*

*dragging it to destruction? You understand, Venerable Brethren, what this disease is – apostasy from God.... There is good reason to believe that this great perversity may be ... the beginning of those evils which are reserved for the last days....*

Pope Paul VI's address on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fatima Apparitions on October 13, 1977, includes his now famous observation:

*“The tail of the devil is functioning in the disintegration of the Catholic world. The darkness of Satan has entered and spread throughout the Catholic Church even to its summit. Apostasy, the loss of faith, is spreading throughout the world and into the highest levels within the Church.”*

In a fascinating address on the Last Things given by Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square on December 14, 2008, the Holy Father said:

*“...before the Lord's arrival there will be apostasy, and one well described as the ‘man of lawlessness’, ‘the son of perdition’ must be revealed, whom tradition would come to call the Antichrist.”*

Now, Our Blessed Mother has made it very clear: she has come to soften the blows both in terms of what we deserve for our sins and in terms of what we require for our purification. She says it all depends on us, on our response to the extraordinary time of grace in which we are living.

*« Les propos sur la fatalité des catastrophes viennent de faux prophètes. Ils disent : tel jour, à telle heure, il y aura une catastrophe. J'ai toujours dit : le châtement surviendra si le monde*

*ni se convertit pas. Appelez les hommes à la conversion. Tout dépend de votre conversion. »*

*“Predictions claiming that catastrophes are inevitable come from false prophets. They say: ‘On such-and-such a day, at-such-and-such an hour, a catastrophe will occur.’ I have always said: Chastisement will happen if the world does not convert. Call everyone to conversion. Everything depends on your conversion.”*

And on that note we will conclude for the evening:

**Everything depends on our conversion.**