... when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

“... when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

Most of us are a little uncomfortable talking about the Second Coming.

• Perhaps it’s because it seems so fantastical, so unreal.
• Maybe it’s because of all the doomsday predictions over the centuries.
• Maybe it’s because it’s been 2,000 years since Jesus spoke about his return that it seems as though it won’t ever happen.
• And maybe it’s because we feel unworthy to “stand before the Son of Man,” and so we think about the Second Coming and the Final Judgment with a sense of dread.

I’m not sure that it helps to delve into the historical and theological debates about how the early Christians understood these things and what they expected. The world is definitely going to end some day; any astronomer will confirm that fact, though it may be a long, long time before it happens.

What matters is our faith. Do we believe the testimony of scripture? Do we trust in God’s providence and the words of Christ?

• Paul says that “creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God ... for creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption ...”
• John writes in the book of Revelation that in his vision he “saw a new heaven and a new earth.”

What Paul and John describe is certainly a great cosmological event, but it is a glorious future not catastrophic one.
But such musings, although they are reassuring are still beside the point. What matters is what Jesus said to his disciples and to us:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ... if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.”

In today’s gospel Jesus cautions: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life...”

On Wednesday night, as we were beginning preparations for Thanksgiving diner, we discovered that half our pie pans were missing. Then the dryer broke. Janet’s dad wasn’t answering his phone, which seldom happens. On top of it the forecast was for freezing rain and we worried about kids and grandkids traveling safely and power outages that might strike in the midst of cooking on Thanksgiving morning.

_Do not let your hearts become drowsy from the anxieties of daily life._

It was a struggle on Wednesday to stay focused on Thanksgiving, that is on cultivating a disposition of thankfulness. It can be an even greater struggle to keep focused on the promises of Christ, which seem so far off, and live with hope in such an imperfect world.

That’s what Advent is about. It’s a time to reflect on our hope in the promises of Christ and not to allow the anxieties of daily life to overwhelm or discourage us.

Advent has two parts. We begin by reflecting on the future, when Christ will come again to take us to himself. Then later in Advent, as we get nearer to Christmas, we naturally reflect on what God has already done for us in the Incarnation and birth of Christ.
“... when these signs begin to happen, 
*stand erect and raise your heads*
*because your redemption is at hand.*”

Why would Jesus need to say this to his disciples?

When Peter, James and John witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ, they were overwhelmed with fright and fell prostrate on the ground for Jesus’ face shown like the sun and his clothing became dazzling white.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah fear came upon him. “*Do not be afraid,*” the Angel said to him, “*because your prayer has been heard.*”

When Gabriel came to Mary, she was greatly troubled, and so he said to her, “*Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God.*”

On the night of Jesus’ birth when the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shown around them, the shepherds were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “*Do not be afraid; for behold I proclaim to you good new of great joy.*”

What’s the message in all of this?
That encountering the divine can be overwhelming, disturbing, and even frightening. Yet in every instance just mentioned, the divine encounter was truly *good news – a cause for rejoicing.* Joy can be overwhelming.

So maybe that’s what you and I need to ponder during this first half of Advent with its focus on the Second Coming of Christ:

- How do I look forward to the coming of Christ?
- How would I respond to an overwhelming event of great Joy?
- Would my faith in Christ’s promises give me the courage to *stand erect and raise my head?*