“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

This past summer I had a wonderful experience going to the Adler Planetarium. There is a new program there which is state of the art, updated every thirty minutes. It gives views of the universe, profoundly beautiful views of the universe, updated from all kinds of sources throughout the earth and outer space, so it’s really the way it looks within the last thirty minutes.

Now what is really astonishing about modern science, especially as it is presented at the Adler Planetarium, is how it agrees with and confirms biblical beliefs. Some people like to emphasize how religion and science are contrary; well, that’s a matter of interpretation. If you know how to look at them, they are actually complementary.

Now the Old Testament, long before modern science, said that the world just came into being by God’s creative purpose. In other words, it wasn’t eternal; the universe hasn’t always been around. That is not what philosophers thought in the past. Aristotle thought it was eternal. He saw that things decayed on earth, but he thought that the heavens were eternal. So did Albert Einstein until his own students pointed out to him that his own mathematics proved that it couldn’t be, and then he thought he made a mistake, and then he finally realized that, yes, the universe has only been around for a short period of time, about thirteen and a half billion years. And it is expanding, and in its expansion it is dying; it is losing heat. And this is what Jesus said in today’s text, again long before modern science discovered entropy. Long before they understood the universe is expanding, Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away.” And indeed they are.

Two other very interesting scenarios from the planetarium: on one picture they show this area outside of the Milky Way in this extraordinary picture of a galaxy cluster. And the voice says now those little lights are not stars; they are whole galaxies. They look as if they are all independent, but actually now look at this and they show an infrared picture, and they are all connected with tiny red lines. Then he says now look at this picture, and it looks almost identical, and he said this is a picture of the human brain. So the human brain is designed just like galaxy clusters. In infrared light they look the same. This shows our astonishing connectedness to everything. And it shows a pattern of intelligence both on the grand scale and on the small scale, and it verifies our great importance in the universe, not our importance to ourselves, our importance to some plan. And that’s what Jesus is talking about today.

Now Jesus contrasts the passing of this world of all creation with his words, which he says shall not pass away. And last night I asked a third grader why Jesus’ words would not pass away? And he said because Jesus is eternal. That’s a correct answer. Words
reflect understanding. **Jesus’ understanding comes from the Word which was in the beginning, was with God and was God. That’s the Word that became flesh, and that’s the root of Jesus’ words, and that’s why they will not pass away.**

Now this eternal world, if you want to say that, realm, dimension from which Jesus comes, the ground of all that is, this has invited all of us with our self-consciousness into a personal relationship, which is destined to be eternal. But as the children last night said, an invitation has to be answered. Some people think that the work of God has just all been done or is something outside of themselves. No, **the world of God is an ongoing project; it involves each of us. We have to answer the invitation. We have to respond. That’s what faith is about.** It’s about responding to the personal source of our being, acknowledging with gratitude our own lives, **but also being willing to do what we are asked to do—faith and faith in action!**

This brings us to the **theme of our parish this year:** “You are the light of the world.” When Jesus said that he was giving a tremendous boost to our self-esteem, and he was placing great confidence in our ability to do and to be what he did and what he was: the light for the world. And we are light for the world when we are good, when we show good example. I am often edified by good people I meet, very often strangers, people who don’t know me, I don’t know them, and yet they do something that’s right, that’s good, that’s honest, that’s just, that’s generous. And that’s very edifying. It edifies everyone. **We edify each other by good example.** On the other hand, we tear each other down by bad example. And the most frightful words Jesus has he uses for those who give bad example: “It would be better for him if a millstone had been hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” That’s pretty dire. By being good example to others **not only are we spreading the gospel in action, but we are also bringing about something better for ourselves.** We are enriching ourselves and developing ourselves in the best possible way. We are responding to grace. We are truly being disciples of Christ and we are preparing ourselves for the great gifts that “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and the mind cannot imagine,” the gifts that God has in store for his beloved.

Now all human being are beloved to God, but some human beings are resisting God’s love and are therefore actually wicked. Yes, there are wicked people in the world, and **it’s precisely the wicked that God wants to save.** The good are already enveloped in his goodness and in his love. The wicked are not. They are on the outside. God wants to bring them on the inside. **How is God going to touch them? Through you, through your goodness, through your good example, through the light shining through you.** That’s how God is going to touch the wicked, and only then will our world become a better world. We all want a better world. How can that be? Only if the wicked convert. If the wicked don’t convert, the world won’t change. This is the work of being light for the world, and **this is the work that Jesus has very trustingly entrusted to you.**