I think it might help us appreciate these stark, rather foreboding readings if we look at them from the vantage point of our being Catholics.

Catholic means universal, all-embracing. By definition, we are part of a religious tradition that takes much into account; sees things from the broadest of perspectives; embraces many cultures, a variety of spiritualities; acknowledges the validity of many political, economic, religious, philosophical perspectives.

As Catholics we have a long tradition of embracing both “the already” and “the not-yet.”
For us, the victory is already won, yet the struggle is not yet over.
We Catholics have traditionally struggled mightily to hold those two apparently opposed convictions in dynamic tension.
On the one hand, we believe the victory is ours … yet on the other, we believe the struggle goes on.

Looked at from a cosmic perspective, the victory has been won. We know the outcome, God has triumphed over evil. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has conquered sin and death, God has triumphed over evil.
That is the “already.”

Viewed from the perspective of the here and now, the “not-yet,” we continue to be caught up in mortal combat. The struggle with evil, with sin, with classism, racism, sexism, with greed, hatred and deceit, all that continues to go on.
The passion and death of Jesus is played out daily in our lives. We are faced with crises on every side—wars, earthquakes, famines, crippling poverty, terrors and persecutions. All those take place both within us and in the outer world. Sometimes we find ourselves betrayed, even by family and close friends.

Jesus insists in today’s Gospel that we must not slip into an attitude that says “the world's going to hell in a hand-cart, nothing I can do but defend myself and those who matter to me against it, or insulate myself from it and wait for the end to come.”

As Catholic Christians, Jesus calls on us today to continue to hold both the “already” and the “not yet” in a dynamic tension.

We are to be those who live in the firm conviction that Christ has conquered sin and death,
that the victory has been won.  
It is that conviction, that vision, which gives us  
the hope and courage to carry on.  

On the other hand we can never lose sight of the fact  
that we are members of the Body of Christ  
in which the passion and death are being played out daily.  
This Gospel insists that we be participants, not mere observers,  
in bringing about the triumph of life and peace over sin and death.  
Through our long-suffering, our persistence, perseverance,  
our patient endurance, as Jesus says today,  
the victory continues to be won, we gain our lives.  

This Gospel story insists that we stand firm with all those  
who refuse to give in to  
incivility, cynicism, meanness, vengeance.  
The spirit of this Gospel story insists that we not join forces with  
the Rush Limbaughs and other nay sayers of this world  
who shout  
“It's a mess and there's nothing we can do  
but defend ourselves and our loved ones against it all;  
or nothing we can do but wait for the rapture.”  

St. Paul in today's second reading almost sounds like  
some of our fellow citizens who say,  
“Those who will not work, let them not eat.”  
Yet Paul's letter is really addressed to  
some influential, wealthy people in Thessalonica.  
They had evidently looked at the mess the world was in  
and had assumed that this was an indication  
of Christ's immediate return.  
Paul chides some of them for “living in idleness, not being busy  
but acting like busybodies” (as a previous translation of this passage put it.)  

So Paul's real message is that of Jesus himself.  
“Through patient endurance, persistence, perseverance,  
you will win your lives.”  

Last Wednesday, there was a celebration of Founders’ Day  
for those who live here and work here.  
There were talks about people carrying of the spirit of the IHM founders.  
All were witnesses to the already and the not yet.  
One of those was by Sister Anne Wisda  
about the work she and Sister Joan Kusak are about  
at a place called Oaks of Righteousness.  
A powerful example of patient endurance, persistence, perseverance.  

Others:  
Habitat for Humanity  
Paula's House
Monroe County Detention Center
Monroe Learning Center
Spirit of Giving