

The last edition of GoodNews4You will be published next week for the Feast of Christ the King. Please enjoy the following reflection first run in 2018.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Daniel 12:1-3 & Mark 13:24-32

One need only go to the movies to see that modern people are worried about the end of the world. No matter what I am at the theater to see, at least half of the previews are for post-apocalyptic stories. The world is a wasteland, all the rules are out the window, which has been blown to smithereens of course, and there is some new enemy that requires moral compromise to conquer. There is no beauty and little hope. The number of apocalyptic movies seems to have sharply risen since 9-11 and, judging by their popularity, many people feel the need to prepare for the looming apocalypse, zombie or otherwise.

The current interest in the apocalypse is not too surprising. Each day seems to bring a new tragedy – another mass shooting, another controversy, another political fist-fight or another humanitarian crisis. As compassionate people and responsible citizens, we follow the news, which is available around the clock. Technology immerses us in the crisis du jour in a way previous generations were not. While this has made us more informed, it also frequently exhausts, jades or discourages us. It is an easy plunge from there to despair. What's more, we are aware of the role humans have had in creating conditions ripe for destruction – the wealth gap, nuclear and assault weaponry, abuse of the environment, etc. We know about our increased vulnerability and we have witnessed too many instances of the resulting natural and human-made devastation.

Concern with the downward trajectory of the world was also common when the biblical books of Daniel and Mark were written. Daniel was written about two hundred years before Jesus and Mark, thirty-five to forty years after Jesus. Both authors and their communities were experiencing hardships and violent death; everything they thought was true had been thrown out the window. Like us, they wanted to know, "Who will win in the long run, when all this is finally over?"

The answer is clearly and unequivocally God. In the parts of the texts we do not read this week, the authors refer to actual historical events so their audience can see that the message is for them but then the authors move beyond what has been experienced to the end of time. The end times will be like nothing we have seen because the hero, hands down, will be God. All power, hands down, will belong to God. Goodness, justice and life will prevail, hands down. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not God.

Fat lot of good this does for us right now! Why can't God ride into town on his white horse and lock up all the bad guys or blow them away with his laser gun? The apocalypse is a battle; why can't we get the battle over with now? How can we find hope in an event we do not even have permission to predict?

Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of hope. Our God unfolds a creative process, drawing all life into fuller life, which is new and different. Jesus' resurrection, for example, was an event that no one could imagine beforehand and could not grasp when it first occurred. We see this also in our own lives: who could have predicted the people we have grown into? We are just beginning to discover the awesome complexities of nature, the cosmos, the human mind, all of which continue to evolve. The detailed answers about the future in our apocalyptic movies are pale, almost comic reflections of what God has in store for us. The German poet Rilke advises us to live the questions we have because we could not handle the answers today. The answers will come, just not today.

In the meanwhile? We must live like we know the end of the story, because we do. God is the end, as God is the beginning and everything in between. To me this means the following: Death is not the final word. Evil does not defeat or even tie with Good. We live in a graced world. God only plans good and plans it for everyone. God will save, be creative and love, no matter what. As Christians, we must live like we believe it: We must choose to believe in Goodness. We must love ourselves and claim the good in ourselves. We must love others and call forth the good in them. We must accept Death as part of our journey to God. We must work with God to bring about goodness. And as we do this, God will unfold our future, filled with life and things we cannot imagine today.

- ❖ Is it possible to maintain an attitude of hope when watching the news? What can help you do so?
- ❖ Where do you make a conscious effort to bring hope into your daily life?