

Homily
November 17, 2024
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Guest Homilist: Fr. Larry Richardt

As we wait in the cold and drafty autumn for the coming of winter, God's word paints a bizarre picture for us. It is a world of darkened suns, falling stars and visions of Jesus in Glory.

This is not the Jesus with whom we are familiar, or even comfortable. This is not the Good Shepherd of so many stained glass windows or the merciful Sacred Heart whose statues beckon us to approach without fear. The Jesus of today's Gospel sounds stern; the first reading confirms this. "There is going to be a time of distress."

Both these texts were written for people who were living under persecution. They were not afraid of these passages from the Word of God because they saw themselves as the ones who would be saved, not condemned, by God's apocalyptic action: "When that time comes, your own people will escape – be spared."

As the second reading makes clear, we are the successors of those early believers. Because Jesus died, making "a single sacrifice for sin," our sins are forgiven. Like those who first heard these readings long ago, we can believe and trust that we are the people who "will be spared," "whose names are found written in the Book." We will be "gathered from the four winds" under the protection of God; the heavens will open for us.

Put in those terms, this all still sounds a bit fantastic, far removed from our daily lives. But look again!

First, these readings remind us that our lives have a direction. We are not ultimately mere victims of our advancing years or declining health. From our birth, our lives – from the heart of God, back to the heart of God – make sense.

We Christians are called in a special way, because of faith, to pull together the strands of our experience to see God's provident hand as our life unfolds. Yes, God will one day come dramatically, as these readings tell us; in the meantime, God comes quietly in our everyday experiences.

Second, God is in charge of our lives – just as God and no one else, not the angels, not even the Son, will bring the story of the world to a close. Being a Christian means dying to the sense that we control our own lives. We allow ourselves to fall into God’s hands.

And third, our response is confident hope. As the letter to the Hebrews says, amazingly Jesus has already “by one offering, made perfect forever those who are consecrated.” We are Christians, believers in resurrection, not death.

The picture that today’s word from God paints is unusual. It is not one that we would choose to have framed for hanging in our rooms! It is a different kind of fall scene because, in it, invisible realities, like the power of God and the value of belief, have become more important than the normal, visible things usually pictured in the scenes which decorate our rooms.

The picture here is of the Christian world with all the hidden parts laid open and all the colors added in. It is the world as it really is, what we have always hoped for but no longer recognize: a God-filled world (heaven and earth are full of your glory) – loved, saved, protected, transformed, renewed. We have accustomed ourselves to seeing only a misshapen world with is a parody of what God desires and will bring to fulfillment.

We adopt God’s vision of the world. This week, we rub our eyes to clear them and strain our vision to see deeply. We will perceive that world coming to birth as we await our annual celebration of the birth of life in Jesus.