

Homily-Yearend Reflection

The Gospel that we hear today is an example of Apocalyptic Literature. The reading has as its source the Gospel of Mark. This teaching of Jesus is being retold through the Evangelist Luke. Luke focuses not only on the future coming of the Son of Man and the signs which will foretell his future coming but it speaks about the importance of vigilance and faithfulness in the lives of the disciples of Jesus, in the members of Luke's community and in our own lives as well.

Apocalyptic literature is a literature that many modern Christians shy away from as a result of its graphic images and scenes of violence. This literature is my favorite biblical literature as it speaks of hope. Apocalyptic literature is produced by communities which are persecuted. The readings say that God is in control of history and that God will win out in the end. Christian apocalyptic says that in the cross and resurrection of Christ the victory over death and evil has been won. The Gospel today speaks of both what God is doing to bring about our final salvation but also what we should be doing to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man at the end of time.

Vigilance, Preparation and Perseverance

Next weekend we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King which is the last weekend of the church calendar. In two weeks we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent which is the first begins our new year. In Advent we celebrate the various ways that Christ comes to us. In Advent we continue to celebrate the coming of Christ at the end of time, the coming of Christ into our lives each day and the coming of Christ at Christmas. Advent gives us a chance to celebrate the dawn of salvation through the incarnation of the Son of Man.

At the beginning of a New Year we look ahead to the upcoming year. As we reflect on the New Year we often make resolutions which help us to accomplish needed changes in our lives. Some resolutions deal with our health, our family life or our faith life. We plan to eat less or exercise more, to be more present in the home or to pray more. All of these are important and good.

I suggest that as we not only make resolutions for the living of the New Year in a different way but that as we come to the end of this church year that we look back over the past year and reflect on what changes we need to make before we enter the New Year. I propose that this year and at the end of each year we make an Examination of Conscience in order to prepare ourselves to move into the New Year with a sense of freedom and purpose. Let us now review our relationship with God and others as we come to the end of this old year.

I invite you to relax and close your eyes and reflect on the following questions and how you need to change in these areas.

Over the past year have we been a people of love? Have we not only been in right relationship with God but have we also been in right relationship with one another? Have we been the people of love that God called us? Have we loved our enemies? Have we decided to hold grudges against others? Have we watered down our friendships? Have we loved our spouses and our children? Have we honored and loved our parents? Have our lives focused only on ourselves and our wants rather than sharing with the people in our lives? Have we gone outside of marriage in order to find love? Is the relationship with my spouse the most important relationship in my life? Have we been a people of love?

Over the past year have we gone beyond love and been a people of justice? Have we cared for the powerless and the poor? Have we found opportunities to reach out to the poor and powerless? Are we a people who have built up walls between others or tear them down? Over this past year have we been a people of justice?

Over this past year have we been a people of integrity? Have we been honest in our dealings with others? Have we been honest at school and work? Have we stolen the ideas and possessions of others? Have we been a people of integrity?

Over this past year have we been a people of faith? Have we been a people who have attempted to learn our faith? Have we been a people who have practiced our faith through participating in the sacraments and especially in the Eucharist? Have we presented the faith to others through sharing with them the Good News that we have received? Have we not only been a people of right belief but also right practice? Over this past year have we been a people of faith?

Finally have we been a people of thanksgiving? Have we been a people who have recognized the grace and presence of Christ in our lives? Have we recognized Christ both in the good times and in the bad? Have we been a people of thanksgiving?

This reading from Luke calls us to not only reflect on the coming of the Son of Man but also on the personal transformation of our own lives. The reading calls us to perseverance. Perseverance is being faithful in the midst of opposition. Let us be a people who persevere in the midst of the difficulty in our lives. Our daily attitude should be one of prayer, alertness and preparation. There should be a sense of vigilance not dread as we approach the future.

Hope and Liberation

The second focus of the Gospel reading is the coming of the Son of Man and the signs which will precede his coming. Luke presents Jesus as a prophet who predicts the future. Luke writes in approximately 85 AD. In our reading he writes about the destruction of the temple which took place in the year 70 AD and the early ministry of the disciples. These events have already taken place and show that Jesus is in fact a prophet.

Jesus says that there will be signs: wars, famines and earthquakes. Many preachers focus on the signs which will come at the end of time. This is attempting to describe mystery. Instead of trying to describe what how and when the end will take place it is important to focus on the larger message of the reading. The message that Jesus is trying to get across is hope. Jesus says that the Son of Man will come at the end of time. If his disciples are faithful to God and their neighbor they will secure their lives.

Jesus says that those who are faithful will experience God's liberation. In the Gospel we read, "When all these things start to happen, stand up! Lift up your heads, because your liberation is coming near!" Salvation is described in terms of liberation. If the disciples of Jesus are faithful and if we are faithful we will be freed from those things which bind us in our earthly life. Certainly this reading describes the liberation which will take place when we experience our future union with God. Liberation is to begin in our lives on earth through our lives of faith and through the ways we help others to experience the liberating love of Christ. Liberation is both a future promise and a gift of Christ for our lives today. Liberation comes from sacraments, prayer and our own work on behalf of those who are bound by the difficulties of life. This includes the spiritually and economically oppressed.

The Book of Revelation is similar to our Gospel reading today in that it also is an example of apocalyptic literature. Both our Gospel and the Book of Revelation speak about hope and salvation. The Book of Revelation shows that God's victory has been won through the cross and resurrection of Christ. The main image of the Book of Revelation is Lamb who was slain. My favorite description of the Book of Revelation comes from Jim McGill. Jim describes the meaning of the Book of Revelation by saying that it is like a football game. We are at halftime. The game has been hard and we are losing. At halftime we are given a glimpse of the final outcome of the game. We know that we be victorious. We know that the second half will be difficult but that in the end we will win. The Book of Revelation gave this type of confidence to Christians who suffered and were angered by the power and corruption of the Roman government. We should gain the same confidence and hope from this book which is often difficult to understand. The Gospel from Luke that we hear today assures us that the Son of Man will come. We are exhorted to be faithful as we await his coming.

The last verse of the Gospel calls us to perseverance. Let us pray for the strength to persevere and to help others persevere as we prepare for eternal life.