

Ordinary B-33 Thanksgiving
2018

The Book of Daniel and Mark's gospel invite us into the apocalyptic viewpoint – the word means “revelation” or “uncovering” – suggesting that in the trajectory of life there is always something new to be discovered. It's important that we not equate what we are considering “apocalyptic” to what we often see on the silver screen – thunderous and violent cosmic battles between good and evil.

Apocalyptic literature is heavy with symbolism, dreams and visions, angels and demons and predictions of the end whether the end of persecution or the end of the world. In the Jewish scriptures the book of Daniel is perhaps the most outstanding example of apocalyptic writing, whereas the Book of Revelation is in the Christian Scriptures. But there are strands of an apocalyptic message in Jesus' preaching. Apocalyptic messages usually appear when a community of believers is under siege, or persecuted, or in exile.

Jesus does speak of cosmic cataclysms—involving the sun, moon, and stars - but not even these can shake the reign of God and ultimately all things will come to be reconciled and made whole in the divine intention. So far from instilling fear, the purpose of apocalyptic teaching is to encourage and instill **hope**.

Sister Mary McGlone, in commenting on this gospel passage, quotes the words of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez: “Hope is the conviction that God is at work in our lives and our world.” She adds: “Rather than optimism based on good odds or our own resources, hope is the certainty that God can transform any situation into an occasion of grace.”

When I was a young priest I had the privilege of meeting Father Cyril Schommer, a Jesuit professor at Canisius College in Buffalo. Not only a scholar and theologian, he was an accomplished concert violinist. He lost the sight of one eye as a young boy, and then in his late years, lost the sight in his other eye. I don't believe, however, that his blindness kept him from his violin.

One day as I had picked Father Schommer up and we were heading to clergy gathering, he relayed the story of his blindness. And then he said something startling: “I am thankful for my blindness, for now I do not approach people based on their appearance, but I must instead listen for their inner goodness.”

I have to admit, I was somewhat shocked – to be so grateful for what many would call a burden. I also have to admit I am not quite “there” where Father Schommer was. But he deeply believed that God had transformed his blindness into an occasion of grace.

So, if I may, to rephrase the words of Gutierrez: “When we hope and **realize** that God is indeed at work in our lives and our world” we are moved to gratitude.

When we are people of Hope, we do so out of a conviction that God is at work in our lives and our world: we can commit ourselves to witness, to advocacy, to persistence, to service, to be peace making. All is possible. Concretely, when we are persons of Hope, in a heartfelt way, we pray, we listen, we search our conscience, we speak up and speak out, we vote.

And when struggles and challenges and crises occasion God's grace – God's transforming grace, we are moved to gratitude. Gratitude grounds us in the present. Gratitude has many layers of expression. We can be grateful for health, for family, for work and rest, for art, music, for play, for friends, for companions, for communities of faith and action etc

There is such a thing as pure gratitude, which has value in itself, but my experience also tells me that gratitude moves us outward – moves us to compassion, for instance, for those who are without, those who suffer and struggle.

And gratitude in turn generates new hope – confidence that the grace of God will continue to break into our lives. Jesus uses the image of the fig tree -- when its branches grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

Jesus calls us to wakefulness – to be alert, attentive to the signs around us. When we see life through a grateful heart we can ask to what does this gratitude call us? What does gratitude awaken in us? How does our gratitude nourish the courage to hope?