

FIRST READING: Daniel 12:1-3

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel:

In those days, I Daniel, heard this word of the Lord: "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

You are my inheritance, O Lord!

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot. I set the LORD ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

You are my inheritance, O Lord!

You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.

You are my inheritance, O Lord!

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters: Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Mark 13:24-32

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark:

Jesus said to his disciples: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. "And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four

winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky. "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 33rd Sunday of the Year

There is a style of writing in both Testaments of the bible. It is called apocalyptic which deals with the coming of God to make all things right. It began to be written during the Babylonian Captivity and Diaspora. All the symbols of religious promise, temple, nation, Jerusalem and Davidic king were gone, destroyed by the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. No longer were these the anchors of faith upon which prophets, priests and people could rely. Everything that made them God's holy people was in ruins. How, in faith, could God's people move forward? Could faith remain powerful in their lives?

What's an apocalypse any way? The word is of Greek origin. It means, literally, from cover. Something hidden, unseen and unknown becomes revealed; hence the name from the last book of the bible, Revelation. It can also be called by its Greek name, Apocalypse. The two names mean more or less the same thing. In a scriptural sense, God reveals God's hidden ways, work and will. God has a plan that we don't see clearly. Only time may tell.

Apocalyptic writing seems to be disjointed and unconnected with reality. It seems dreamlike and hallucinatory. Strange, frightening images have replaced familiar ones of temple, sanctuary, Promised Land and king. The scenarios in which God's word is presented are now taking place in an other-worldly place; in God's court. God's temple is gone. God seems to be absent. Yet, God's ancient promise is still real. How will God's promise reach fulfillment? Without a king and army, Michael the great warrior archangel takes up the role of protection. How much protection an angel can be is still up for debate for an angel is a spirit and cannot wield real armaments.

Today, books can be electronic, and are files of ones and zeros not of print and paper. What is a book made of spirit? Who can tell whose names are included in it? These are challenges for people who read the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. Quite frankly, they are so fantastic, as in phantasm, their images and messages can be scary! Beasts, books and battles do not sound grounded in real lives. They can read like a horror or ghost story. Yet these like all the other books of scripture are God's Word. How can we approach and read them for meaning and good news?

One of the best approaches for this, I have ever heard, is to approach this type of biblical literature in a different manner than narrative and prophesy scriptures. There is also poetry in the bible, wisdom writings and the Psalms. Poetry requires more of us. It is sensual, ambiguous and often symbolic. In our digital world apocalyptic writings will always remain analog. They are analogies to things in an ancient world that no longer exists. Discerning meaning always needs historical touch points to know the context that existed then.

Fr. Jim McIlhone is a Chicago priest and biblical scholar. Though now retired, he maintains a fine biblical website, <http://www.wordmadeclear.net>. He pointed to a song by the late Tommy Makem, who was an Irish singer, songwriter, poet and storyteller. He wrote a song called "Four Green Fields." I have included a third page; this week with the lyrics and a satellite picture of the "Emerald Isle" that is Ireland. The song tells the story of a fine, old woman who has four green fields. These relate to the ancient four provinces of Ireland, Connacht, Leinster, Munster, and Ulster and the British occupation of the country. The song also relates the struggle for independence. To a person who does not know the history behind the images, this is just another sentimental Irish folk song of happy wars and sad love stories. In reality, it tells a story of the hope of an occupied, oppressed people for freedom and the people's willingness to die in the struggle to be free. The old woman is Ireland itself. The shape of the island can be seen, like people see a face or a rabbit on the surface of the moon, as the profile of an old woman or as the shape of said woman walking with a burden on her back.

I've heard Tommy Makem sing this, his song in concert, live several times. I know the history and have been to Ireland twice. As far as I know, there's not a drop of Irish in me. When I've heard Makem sing, his lyrics bring tears to my eyes. His poetic references strike in me a deep chord. Music, vocal artistry and poetry meet in harmony and hope. "My four green fields will bloom once again said she." This is also the intent of Daniel. He wanted God's people to believe, trust and hope in God. All may be lost; salvation is coming and soon. How it will happen will be revealed in time and with God's eternal presence. Israel and Judah were gone but God's people remain and God remains with them.

There were two kinds of priests in the Judaism of Jesus' day, the High Priesthood and the Levitical Priesthood. The High Priest was elected each year from among the Levitical priesthood to offer the Sacrifice for the Feast of Atonement for the sins of the nation and all Jewish people still in Diaspora. The Levitical Priests offered sacrifices for the every day services in the temple. The Jewish priesthood came to an end with the Roman invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by its legions in 70 CE. Hebrews was written, in the opinion of scholars as early as 64 CE or as late as 100 CE and any where in between. From this passage, it's possible to infer that the Jewish priesthood still existed. Hebrews spoke of it being contemporary, which can lead to an early date. However, the author's point is about the High Priesthood of Jesus. From a Christo-centric point of view, the date can be a later one.

The Sacrifices that the Jewish priesthood offered were live animals that were slaughtered and then roasted. The purpose of this had always confused me. God is a spirit and has no need for food. The dead bodies of all these critters were not burnt but roasted. Burning flesh is also foul-smelling. People tend to avoid such odors, wouldn't God as well? Yet people gathered in the temple every day. However how does roasting food smell? Don't people's homes smell good at the holidays? That's when people gathered the most in the temple as we gather in our homes. The roasted meat helped to feed the priests, attendants and service people and their families of the temple too. As God's people enjoy the good smells as they gather, so does God who gathers with them. Eating is a human necessity. Dining is something we do together. In ancient Judaism, God's presence made all life in and around the temple holy.

The early Church was first Jewish. We can forget our origins all too quickly. The context of our mass is still a meal and feast. We offer a sacrifice too, just not in the same way. The Eucharist is both a meal and sacrifice. What we offer is not an animal sacrifice; we kill nothing. We offer Jesus who offered himself to us. He died for our sin and having risen from the dead, will never die again. Jesus lives forever. Jesus lives with us, is united with the Father and will return at the

end of the age. Jesus died once and for all for our sakes. The difference is that we offer a sacrifice that God first offered to us, Jesus. So why do we offer mass so often?

We gather to remember what Jesus has done. Two thousand years after the event, Jesus choice and actions are still at work within us. We weren't there. We have never witnessed Jesus' saving work. We celebrate Jesus deeds and offer God thanks for them. Our offering is bread and wine, food that become Jesus body and blood that we share as food. In gathering together, we gather in Jesus' name and become his Church, the living people who are his mystical body. Jesus lives through with and in us. This is our inner identity. As a sign, or sacrament of who we are, we receive communion, which is Jesus body and blood. In remembering what Jesus did, it is as if we were present during the events we celebrate; we know Jesus in the breaking of bread. Jesus, as the eternal Word of God is the High Priest who saves us. His saving work continues through us and our witness.

The gospel is not a lesson in astrophysics and the destruction of sun, moon and stars. A sun, or star, dies as a nova. It will only grow dim after it explodes. They don't fall either. In space there's no gravity. The moon reflects light. It does not produce its own light. We all know that the cosmos had a beginning, as did each of us. The cosmos most likely will end too, like us. That's inevitable. We may fear our end, but what did Jesus tell us? He'll be present when it happens. We'll know it too. Jesus can transform our fear into hope as he transformed his death into eternal life. He received that gift and has promised us eternal life with him. Hope out of fear and eternal life out of death.

We know that as sure as winter is near, spring and summer will follow. Fall is not the end but another beginning even if it's only another season, winter. Could this be the lesson from the fig tree? I have always enjoyed figs. I like Fig Newtons too. I understand that fresh figs are tasty too. Since Jesus has mentioned them in today's gospel, maybe we have that in common. Could the lesson also be, enjoy this life like you enjoy figs? Something much more will come too; eternal life in God's kingdom. Has Jesus foretold our end or our beginning in him?

Jesus has saved us once and for all. Jesus fulfilled his mission and now we continue it. We strive to the Kingdom of God. Our future and destiny are in God's loving hands and in God's time. From today's scripture we have heard that God continues to act through us, God's children and Jesus' siblings. We face uncertainty as people of faith. As we believe in Jesus and as we trust Jesus' promise, we hope. We seek to know Jesus' presence now. We will find it now, when we need it and in the eternal life he promised. Jesus remains with us.

May we know the warmth of God's love.

James D. Beath
November 13-14, 2021

Four Green Fields

Tommy Makem

What do I have, said the fine old woman
What do I have, this proud old woman did say
I have four green fields, each one was a jewel
But strangers came and tried to take them from me
I have fine strong sons, who fought to save my jewels

They fought and they died, and that was my grief said she

Long time ago, said the fine old woman
Long time ago, this proud old woman did say
There was war and death, plundering and pillage
My children starved, by mountain, valley and sea
And their wailing cries, they shook the very heavens
My four green fields ran red with their blood, said she

What have I now, said the fine old woman
What have I now, this proud old woman did say
I have four green fields, one of them's in bondage
In stranger's hands, that tried to take it from me
But my sons had sons, as brave as were their fathers
My fourth green field will bloom once again said she



The Old Woman of Ireland

Here's a picture of Ireland as seen by satellite. Like an inkblot and the moon, people can see shapes in this picture. Some see an old woman's face in profile or an old woman carrying a burden on her back as she walks.