

Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 17-18, 2018

Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32

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As the end of our liturgical year approaches, and the days are getting shorter, do you feel as though our readings seem to reflect the darkness?

In the book of Daniel, we read that “it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began...” And in Mark, Jesus speaks of the sun being darkened, the moon no longer giving its light, and the stars falling from the sky.

Perhaps these lines seem to address the personal, national and global crises that are wreaking death and destruction upon the most vulnerable among us, and on our planet. Mass shootings. Hordes of refugees. Extreme child poverty in our city. Climate change denials.

But wait! Although these lines have a doomsday gloom about them, they are examples of apocalyptic writing that were and are meant to instill hope in their listeners. Hope? Really? If we understand their origin in a very Jewish mentality, we will see that they hold a profound and important truth for all believers.

The Jews of Daniel's time were persecuted unmercifully. Daniel is reassuring them that God has not abandoned them in their struggles. “I, Daniel, heard this word from the Lord...” The promise is straight from God! Thus Michael, “guardian of your people,” will come to offer protection. Everyone “who is found written in the book” will escape. The challenge is to trust. God is the God of history and will reward the persevering faithful.

Where have we learned to trust God in our struggles?

Many years ago, our third son became deathly ill. For probably the first time, I wasn't asking God in prayer for a particular outcome. I really didn't know what to pray for. So I just prayed, “God, only You know if I can survive a second child's death, or whether I am able to handle a child who may be

disabled for the rest of his life. I trust You to do what is best.”

Karl survived, but with multiple issues. I have often joked that he has been to hell and back a few times. And taken me along for the ride! Decades of fighting the system to get the help he needs. Mercurial mood swings. Medical crises. Not only has our faithful God sustained me through it all, but taught me and our family lessons of compassion, patience and perseverance.

More recently, a woman of deep faith whom I know had open heart surgery. There were many bumps on her road to recovery, but perhaps the biggest blow was being denied the rehab she needed. Although she was far too weak to go home alone and care for herself, she had passed the low bar set by the insurance company, and the hospital had to release her. Her friends were quite worried about this situation. But she just kept saying that God would take care of her. One friend remarked, that, yes, God would, but God had also taken care of the martyrs, and they still died! At the last minute, an opportunity arose to get some assistance. God had, indeed, been taking care of her.

God's presence remains with us, even as Mark's gospel warns of the dangers of the last days. The “tribulation” he predicts for his disciples is about to take place for himself. In the verses following today's gospel, Jesus exhorts his disciples—that includes us—to keep awake because no one knows when he will return. Meanwhile, we need to keep our eyes open for signs of his presence already with us through his Spirit. Present to us in the people and circumstances of our lives. And in the needs of all God's people. God is present to those who live by Jesus' words and the example of his life. As our first reading tells us, the wise shall shine brightly and those who lead the many to righteousness shall be like the stars forever.

As we look forward to Advent, the light of Christ brightens the darkness. Whatever our tribulations, God is present with us. We can be confident because the One who has promised is faithful.