

33rd Sunday of the Year, Year C, 2007**Readings: Malachi 3: 19-20a; 2 Thess 3:7-12; Luke 21: 5-19****All will be well; every kind of thing will be well**

Today's readings' may leave many of us uncomfortable. They use words and ideas we might hear from a fundamentalist television preacher proclaiming that the end of the world is near. They seem to have a message that well educated people like most of us find hard or even impossible to accept. But if we listen carefully, I think the readings can be deeply consoling to us. They tell us that no matter what happens in our personal lives or our social and political existence, "all will be well," as the great woman spiritual writer of the 14th century, Julian of Norwich, put it. Let's consider how this might be.

The gospel passage is written in a literary form biblical scholars call "apocalyptic." Apocalyptic means "uncovering" God's plan for our lives, including how life should end or turn out. In Biblical times this kind of literature flourished when there were crises such as a national calamity or persecution. In the gospel today Jesus speaks about such crises. There will wars and insurrections. Nations will fight against nations. The earth will protest with mighty quakes, the biosystem will spawn plague and famine. The sky will light up with omens. Indeed, Jesus speaks vividly about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the very heart of Israel's identity and say it will be destroyed. "There will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

This is as if Jesus said to us Americans that not only the World Trade Center but the US Capital building or the White House will be destroyed, or telling Catholics that St. Peter's in Rome would be bombed. More personally, it would be like telling one of us that the home or the town we grew up in would be wiped out by terrorists. In effect, Jesus is telling his listeners that the world as they know it will be no more. That's why this passage is often interpreted to be about the end of the world. Teachings like this got Jesus in deep trouble. Remember that the charge that led to Jesus's execution was that he predicted the temple's destruction.

How can this speak to us today? Biblical scholars tell us that the main purpose of apocalyptic literature is not to make predictions about when the world will end or about future events. Rather, the dramatic images are better understood as being about what is happening now. The focus on the present is clear if we recognize that the gospel of Luke, from which today's reading is taken, was written in about the year 80. Ten years earlier, in the year 70, the temple had already been destroyed by Roman legions seeking to keep Israel under Roman control. What Jesus predicted had become a present reality. Luke applies Jesus words to the events of his own day. Not in the future, but now, there are wars and insurrections. Not in the future, but now, there will be plagues and earthquakes. Not in the future, but now, those who follow Christ will be rejected and persecuted. Sounds like our

own time when we read the morning paper about war in Iraq, the plague of AIDS, cyclones in Bangladesh, or the persecution of Christians in southern Sudan.

The good news comes when we listen to what Jesus says is happening at a deeper level in the midst of these present struggles and conflicts. Jesus goes on to say that when you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, do not be afraid. In the midst of struggle I will give you a wisdom your adversaries will be powerless against. I will be with you and will support you. Even if things get really bad, not a hair on your head will be lost.

Jesus is telling us that God is with us and protects us no matter what. In the 14th century, Julian of Norwich came to a deep awareness that this was Jesus' promise to his followers. Julian had a profound spiritual experience of God, and in this experience she learned that God promises both her and us that even when the going gets really tough, "all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well." When someone asked Julian the meaning of Jesus's words in the midst of the sufferings and injustices of the world, she replied: "Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love." Not a hair of hair of your head will be lost. Be confident, have trust, and even in the midst of struggles be joyful. All will be well, because God loves us always. God's love will always be with us.