

HOMILY: **33rd Sunday of the Year [BA]**

Daniel 12: 1-3 / Hebrews 19: 11-14, 18 / Mark 13: 24-32

So is **this** how the world ends?

Diners and concert-goers enjoying a beautiful Friday evening in one of the world's great cities are massacred; passenger planes are shot out of the sky for flying over the wrong country; commuters are killed by bombs strapped to the backs of young men and women who have somehow come to the crazy idea that God is praised in their deaths?

Is this how the world ends?

Or does the world end as a dried-up ball of dust? Every plant burned to a crisp, every drop of water evaporated the atmosphere a dark cloud of dirt? So much for "better living through chemistry."

Or is our moral and ethical compass so totally out of whack that God has checked out of this world altogether?

Is that how the world ends?

That's the question posed by today's Gospel and all the Gospels we hear on these last Sundays of the year. It's certainly on our minds this weekend in the wake of the horror in Paris.

But that question has been asked by every generation since Adam. People of every time and place have seen signs that have terrified them into thinking that God was done with them:

The flood of Noah's time . . .

The invasion of Israel by the Assyrians followed by the invasion of the Babylonians followed by the invasion of the Romans capped off by the destruction of the temple . . .

The barbarians' siege of Rome . . .

The "Black Death" that devastated Europe in the 14th century . . .

Two world wars and countless other armed conflicts in the 20th century . . .

The fear of Communist world domination . . .

And now, humankind seems hell-bent on destroying our planet either by war in the name of God or by stripping away every natural resource in the name of commerce until there's nothing left.

And yet . . .

And yet . . .

We humans always seem to find our way out of the darkness of the long night and manage to make to morning.

How do we do it?

Because of the **Word**.

The Word that makes its dwelling among us.

The Word that moves us beyond the cross of Good Friday to the Easter resurrection.

The Word that unites us and brings us together for the good of all.

The Word of God that becomes like us so that we might become like God.

Somehow, God's Word of compassion manages to be heard in enough human hearts so that the devastated are rebuilt and the broken are made whole. And we are able to start again.

Yes, there will be days when the sun will be darkened,
when the moon will not give its light,
when the stars will fall from the sky,
when the powers will be shaken.

We will all know ugly and awful and bloody and deadly days.

And we will be forever changed again and again.

But the Word of God, the Word that is God, remains. If we look hard enough, we will see its light. If we listen closely, we will hear it whisper.

We behold that Word in the work of those who put themselves in harm's way for the sake of others . . .

in the selflessness of those who clean up the messes made by the selfish and greedy . . .

in the dedication of those who rebuild what has been destroyed, who go out to find the lost and bring home the missing . . .

in the wisdom of those who lead us to hope by the example of their generosity and courage . . .

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

In case you missed it at your baptism, Jesus' words are within you, calling you and me to take on his work of mercy and justice and peace.

And the work begins in your little bit of earth, with the care of your own fig tree.

Saturday morning Ann and I were watching the television coverage from Paris until I had to leave with to meet with an engaged couple I'm working with. They're terrific. It's been a joy to know them and work with them to prepare for their big day. Their lives are filled with hope and promise. My meeting with them turned out to be, for me, the blessing of the Gospel fig tree: a sign that God is in our midst. In their love for each other, God makes known his love for all of us.

And that's what real faith is: to be able to read the "signs" of God's presence in our lives and our world. It's not all that difficult, really - it requires an attentiveness to God's mercy and love around us, an active "search engine" that seeks what is good in the midst of evil, an attitude of hope that finds ways to transform hard and difficult circumstances into something healing and hopeful in God's grace.

On this somber weekend, may we recognize the sign of the Gospel fig tree - and may we be ready to take up the rake and hoe to harvest its sweet figs.

+ + + + +

Jay Cormier
Saints Mary and Joseph Parish
Salem, N.H.
November 14-15, 2015