



A Word for Sunday

Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 13:24-32; (R1) Daniel 12:1-3; (R2) Hebrews 10:11-14, 18.

As the church year draws to an end, the Church exposes us to some of the apocalyptic literature in the Bible: Daniel and Mark's 13th chapter.

Apocalyptic literature originated in times of persecution. Daniel was written about 164 B.C. during the terrible persecution of the mad king Antiochus. Mark's gospel was written at a time when it was dangerous to be a Christian. Peter and Paul had been executed. Nero had issued a Law: Non Licet Esse Vos (You have no right to exist), which made all Christians open game for nearly three centuries in the Roman Empire.

Because of the dangerous climate, apocalyptic literature did not go underground, but instead became coded. The code was clear to those for whom it was written, but gibberish to those against whom it was penned. This had to be done in order to avoid reprisals or an intensification of persecution.

Our literature possesses this apocalyptic form in the Negro Spirituals. Take "Let My People Go." The slaves sang it in their wooden plantation churches: "Tell ole Pharaoh, To let my people go." It's a longing for freedom and hope for a better life someday. True biblical piety. And who is "ole Pharaoh," but the "boss man" of the plantation.

Apocalyptic literature was hope literature. It aimed at inspiring hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. The word "apocalypse" means "unveiling." Apocalypses unveiled the truth that God is the Lord of history, that He's got the whole world in His hands, that in the end good will triumph over evil. And so the message always was — have hope, do not despair, persevere in the end goodness and right will triumph — for God is in charge!

When Antiochus was slaughtering the worshippers of the true God, the author of Daniel reminded them that they had as their guardian the prince of the angels — Michael. "Everyone found written in the book shall escape. Even those who

had been martyred shall awake and live forever (the first explicit mention of resurrection after death in the Bible). They shall be like the stars forever." The conclusion? Don't give up! Persevere!

In Mark's day, Christians believed the second coming of the Son of Man (the Parousia) was imminent and linked to the destruction of the Temple. Titus had destroyed the Temple (70 A.D.), but there was no Parousia. The end of the Temple did not usher in the End. Mark addressed this problem by relegating the Temple's destruction as only a preliminary sign: the birthpangs of the End. In doing this, he uses all the paraphernalia of apocalyptic literature. If you watch a Dracula movie, you expect to see inky black horses pulling a stagecoach on a moonless night through a dark woods toward a ruined castle, with bats flying crazily in the air and an owl screeching. These are the staples of a Dracula movie. So in apocalypse, there are cosmic upheavals, the sun is darkened, the moon sheds no light, the stars fall from the sky — all very scary and frightening.

But the whole point is that God's in control. No matter the persecutions, the wars, the false prophets — look out for these, but look up and know that He is coming — the Son of Man is in power and glory. And He comes not to judge His own, but "to assemble them from the four winds." In other words, His coming will be a consolation, a comfort, a joy for His own. This promise is the hope that enables Christians to endure to the End.

After this comforting presentation, Mark stresses the nearness of the Parousia. He wants Christians to spend the intervening time fruitfully. Too bad Sunday's gospel ends where it does. The next verse says, "Be constantly on the watch! Stay Awake!" This exhortation is the gist of the entire chapter.

The Parousia is an apocalyptic symbol: it simply says God's plan of salvation is a well-rounded one. He sent His Son once to save; He will send Him a second time to gather the saved.

Healing service

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healing prayer and daily radio programs have been introduced in New England and as far west as Des Moines, Iowa.

In Rochester, Father McDonough led services at St. Peter and Paul Church on Tuesday, Nov. 5, and Blessed Sacrament Church Wednesday, Nov. 6.

People began arriving at Blessed Sacrament on Wednesday more than an hour before the service was scheduled to start. By 7:15 p.m., the parking lot and nearby streets were as jammed with cars as the church was with people of all ages and types. Many were visibly disabled — in wheelchairs or with canes or walkers. But there were also many whose reasons for coming were not apparent.

Finally, about 20 minutes late, Father McDonough stepped out from the sacristy in his characteristic white alb and red stole. As he began to share his views on healing ministry in a gentle, reasonable voice, the people in the church fell silent.

"There are many ways of having a healing service just like there are many ways to pray," Father McDonough said. "This is not necessarily the best way. The greatest healing service of all is the holy sacrifice of the Mass."

Explaining that there are three different types of healing — spiritual, physical and mental or emotional — he termed the most important healing as spiritual.

The reason God heals people in a dramatic physical way, he said, is as a witness to the world. "We have healing today as a sign of Jesus' presence, not to take the place of doctors or medicine," he continued, noting that the latter should also be regarded as gifts from God.

He also reminded people in the congregation of their own potential as instruments of God's healing power. "Our vocation is to be another Christ, to take God's place to those

who are discouraged, sick and suffering," he said.

Although he encouraged the congregation to petition God, Father McDonough also urged that people recognize and appreciate the gifts and blessings they have already been given.

"Some people are always depressed — they're not happy with their jobs, they don't make enough money, they don't have any friends ... They're always concentrating on the things they don't have," he observed.

"Let us not make this mistake — let us thank God for the gift of life, the gift of faith, the healings you don't need. Never to be blind is far more remarkable than being healed after 50 years of not being able to see."

The service continued with scriptural readings, prayer and more short talks by Father McDonough. Finally, after an appeal for financial support and a collection, Father McDonough asked those in the audience who suffered from arthritis to raise their hands. He then asked if any had experienced a healing of their pain. Slowly and hesitantly at first, one woman and then another rose and came forward to share what they termed as healings.

As each concluded her story, she was led to the sacristy to fill out a form documenting the healing. Meanwhile, Father McDonough asked about healings of hearing loss, eyesight and a number of other afflictions.

A short time later, he left the sanctuary to bless the congregation with holy water and pray over people individually.

One of those people, Catherine Culhane, had suffered from a herniated disc in her upper back for the past four months. As a result of brachial nerve damage in her left arm, she had experienced almost constant pain.

As Father McDonough came down the aisle toward her, Culhane said she felt a great sense of warmth and relief flood over her. "I felt my knees kind of go out and I sat down," she said.

On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy



Reflection of Mother Teresa

I first knew Mercy Sister Pat Flynn in 1966. She was then 'Sister Blaise,' teaching second grade at St. Ann's School, Hornell. She was a good friend of Father Lane, and of Sister Irma Lynch, who was killed in 1970 with Sister Kieran Byrne in a terrible accident south of Wayland. Father Delmonte anointed them and was shaken for months afterward.

After Vatican II, many sisters left the classroom to work in the inner city among the poorest of the poor. One was Sister Blaise, now Sister Pat, of St. Andrew's Convent on Barberry Terrace, Rochester. After 19 years, she is still there. She established St. Michael's Woodshop at St. Michael's Church, Rochester, in the heart of the inner city. Her aim was to give inner city youths a skill as well as a sense of personal dignity and independence, and to foster ambition and reliability in using these skills. She receives no help from the Diocesan Pastoral Center because, like Mother Teresa, she refuses to use valuable time to attend meetings. With the Pastoral Center, no meetings means no accounting, and that means no assistance.

Eastman Kodak Company, however, has provided carpenters, lumber and machinery from the beginning. Hadlock, Rochester Picture Framing and many other business people have been generous, and a modest cash flow comes in because of the good hearts of many people. Many of our diocesan priests send \$100 each year. The youngsters are not paid, but do receive an allowance of \$25 a week, which helps in situations of such poverty. The class size averages 15. "That's all I can afford," said Sister Pat. "We would have more if we had the money."

"Sister, will you write up an article something like Father Ritter's?" I asked her. "I should like to use it to acquaint people with your work." She balked, lest it seem like self-praise. Finally, she consented. Here are some excerpts:

"You asked me to write of my successes. This goes against my will, but I guess I owe you a few favors. Many

young men and women, all with good potential, have crossed my path during my 19 years in the 'Sacred City.' What effect I had on them I'll never know, because those who have 'succeeded' have done so through a combination of family, school and (I hope) programs like mine.

What is success? I could tell you of the guy I worked with almost every day for seven years. He became one of the chief pimps in the city. I dealt with many of his 'girls' when I used to have woodworking classes at Monroe County Jail (before I was booted out because of overcrowded conditions up there). He was cool, and took care of his 'girls.' On occasion, he would even pick me up in his Cadillac, complete with phone, TV and bar, and give me a ride home. I think he feels he has succeeded.

"Really, I haven't kept track of all my kids. Many have gone to college. Many have jobs at Eastman Kodak. One is a sheriff's deputy. Many are raising families. All I do know, though, is that I must have come across as a person who is there when there is a need. As these young men and women grow up, and financial, housing, marital or family problems arise, they somehow find me again. That makes me happy.

"I think my successes are more evident with the parents of my kids more than anything else. The mothers who call in all honesty and humility to tell me that they have no food or their son is in trouble again. (Could I go to court with them?) The mothers who are so proud to invite me to the graduations of their sons and daughters from high school, or even moreso, from college. The mothers once in my program who call to tell about the birth of their babies (and, as these kids grow up, I'm called 'Grandma Pat').

"I could go on and on. One of my big worries is that I don't want to be making an impression of how good I am. I can only do the good I do because of so many generous people. They make the sacrifices, and I reap the joy of seeing many lives turned around and sadness turned to joy. Peace!"

"I don't even know what he said to me, but the pain just left. It's still sore, but the pain is gone. I don't know if this is really real or just psychological. It's so hard to believe it could just disappear," Culhane said.

An elderly woman named Joan came to the service using a walker. When Father McDonough approached and blessed her, she collapsed in the aisle and was lowered to the floor by ushers. She later called her reaction "resting in the Spirit," and described it as a peaceful feeling of letting go.

Joan lay on the floor for several minutes, then was helped up. She proceeded to walk with some assistance around the church, a greater distance than she'd gone without her walker in a long time. "I feel good," she said, shaken. "I want to be healed, but I don't know if I am or not."

Meanwhile, Father McDonough continued to bless people in the congregation. Some collapsed, while others laughed or cried, unsure whether to believe they'd been healed. Those who did believe it described the sensation as warm and tingling.

Father McDonough, on the other hand, later said that he doesn't feel anything when praying over people — no sensation of being drained or of a surge of power. "I'm glad I don't feel anything," he added. "If you did, you'd soon go crazy."

He does notice certain external signs that tell him when a person has been healed. "There was a girl here tonight. You could see she was very tense, very uptight, and then I saw the tension go out of her," he said.

Father McDonough is always aware of the need to remind people that the healing power is not his, but rather God's. "They're not idolatrous," he said, "but people are desperate. It's understandable if you have cancer and you think that God is working through

this person tonight."

Sometimes he shares their desperation. Although he is accustomed to dealing with suffering people, there are times when compassion moves him to wish, only for a moment, that he could make the decision instead of acting as an impartial instrument of God's power.

In Boston he frequently he visits a once-beautiful young girl whose sickness has caused her to appear withered and old. Likewise, when small children or infants are suffering and he sees no signs of healing, it's difficult to accept God's will.

"You have to take the attitude that God is in charge," he explained. "You can't get elated when something does happen or all down in the dumps when it doesn't. You've got to believe in faith that God knows what he's doing and it's up to God to heal people or not."

As Wednesday evening's service ended, Joan was still not sure if she'd been healed. "I have a lot of things wrong with me," she said. "I'd be glad to be healed of any of them."

Meanwhile, two days later, Catherine Culhane was equally certain she had been healed. A week ago, her neurosurgeon strongly urged her to have surgery. After the healing service, she had another examination, but didn't tell the doctor about what she suspected.

"You haven't regained full strength yet, but I see a big improvement," he told her. "I see no reason for surgery now."

"I'm very thankful," Culhane said. "You know you're just not the same person when you're in pain ... I have a 15-year-old son who just brought home the most beautiful report card. I've been dying to hug him but I couldn't. Now I can."

Folk Mass

Anyone seeking an informal, intimate Eucharistic celebration is invited to a monthly folk Mass at Blessed Sacrament Church

on the corner of Monroe Avenue and Oxford Street. Mass is scheduled on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m.