

Thirty Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 15, 2015

A basic premise for orthodox Biblical scholars—both Catholic and Protestant—agree that Sacred Scriptures were never intended to be read as one would read say, a science or history text. But the Bible *is* infallible in helping us understand our path to salvation and the role of faith in history. Such as how the world came to be, how sin happened for the first time, why do bad things happen to good people and who's in charge of everything?

The Second Vatican Council document, *Dei verbum*, "The Word of God", teaches us that there are different genres of biblical literature just as there are different genres of secular literature.

So for example, if we read a chemistry book the same way we read science fiction, we're probably going to be confused.

If we read the sports page the same way we read a history book, we'll be severely misled by headlines like "The Giants Defeat the Vikings".

Likewise, if we read biblical history the way we read secular history we're going to consistently miss the point.

Today's Gospel passage belongs to a particular genre called "apocalyptic" writings. Apocalyptic tells us that what we're reading is a revelation born of imminent danger and utter destruction.

So Apocalyptic literature naturally arises in times of suffering and crisis. These parts of the Bible, and perhaps the book of Revelation is the Bible's most famous example, are intended to help people who experience great hardship to know that the Lord of history would eventually vindicate his people

Our Gospel reading was written during the early days of the church's existence in Rome. The church was an outlaw group, despised and distrusted by most of Roman culture.

Since Christians were helpless against the power of Rome, they had no choice but survive as well as they could, in hope of final vindication by God.

Apocalyptic writings aren't just imaginary stories to keep children from being afraid. As Hamlet said, there are things that philosophy does not know, different kinds of truth than literal truth or media truth.

So what is the truth revealed in Mark's apocalyptic writings? The first clue comes from the situation. It describes the end of time. That obvious fact is important.

The world will not go on forever. And since it will end, it must end somehow: with a bang or a whimper, in futility or meaning, into nothingness or a different kind of existence. Therefore, we *have* to make a choice as to what we believe and then live our lives according to that choice.

The image of Jesus coming on a cloud in majesty means that the end of time will be concluded by God's own Son.

That means creation has a purpose and that secular history has been and always will be governed by divine providence, and that individual lives have value and meaning.

The image of God gathering his faithful people meant that goodness will be rewarded, and eternal life will be endless happiness with God.

Putting all these images together, they gave our spiritual ancestors hope of ultimate victory — even under terrible persecution and slaughter.

But what about us? Since we're not persecuted in the same way as the early Christians or ancient Israel, certainly we have no need for this hopeful, encouraging literature. Or do we?

Well, aside from being involved in several wars, a new outburst of terrorism in France, living in what we would all agree is a dangerous world, being trapped in personal sins – we are part of a disintegrating earth, a history that is rushing headlong toward its end.

In our busyness and in our own plans for the future, we forget the basic reality that it will all end, tomorrow or in a million years. And the apocalyptic choices we make are always binding.

For example, creation is either meaningful or meaningless, history is guided by providence or not, our lives have meaning or not, goodness or evil will triumph, we will live happily with God for eternity or slip into nothingness.

Our readings this weekend are designed to help us understand that as we approach the end of the liturgical year, the one thing we can count on, is that we have hope in knowing that the end of history is in God's hands. We have hope knowing that in the midst of all the chaos and heartache that surrounds us, the world is ultimately the creation of a loving parent.

We have hope knowing that the goodness of Christ is greater than the brutality of violence. We have hope knowing that the world's final destination rests in the hands of the boundless mercy of God.