

I hope everyone is hanging in there. November can be a tough month for some people as the days become noticeably shorter and colder and we know it's going to get even worse before it gets better. Oh, we can distract ourselves with holidays and shopping for a month but then the real cold hits. But we get through it every year because we know from our past experiences that spring follows winter. We tell our kids we've lived through the toughest of winters and survived... and so will they.

My mom said the same thing about living through tough times. If we ever complained she would tell us stories about growing up in the depression and then the war. With faith, courage, and sacrifice, they got through it.

Recalling a time in the past when things were looking pretty grim and then remembering that it did eventually get better is a little like the genre of apocalyptic literature. It's a complex way of telling a traumatic story of a time long ago when a suffering people looked forward to better times promised to them and survived. That's what the book of Daniel is about as well as our Gospel passage today. It's a weird complicated style of writing but the message gets through.

The Book of Daniel was written 200 years before Jesus when the Jews were suffering under tyrannical Greek kings who took over after Alexander the Great had conquered everything. It was a brutal time, when the Jews were tortured and killed if they wouldn't give up their faith. The story of Daniel was written to give the Jewish people courage and hope. But the story itself takes place at the time of the Babylonian exile 400 years earlier. The author used symbolic language to prophesy how God would rescue the faithful, like Daniel and his friends, and will do it again and again in the future, all the way to the end of world. And it gave the Jews hope.

At the time of Jesus, the Jews were again suffering from oppression, this time from the Romans. The people could sense, just like our oncoming winter, that things were soon going to go from bad to worse. Many Jews again looked to the story of Daniel for inspiration. When speaking about the future, Jesus sometimes used some of the same symbolic language found in Daniel. He warned about three very traumatic events. First was His own passion and death. Second was the destruction of the temple which was the very center of

the Jewish faith and culture. And to top it off and fulfill the prophecy of Daniel, He also spoke of His second coming.

When He speaks of the sun going dark and the stars falling from the sky, (remember those were the two most common tools for navigation) He is telling the Jews that they are going to lose the institutions that have guided them in the past. They must look away from the priest and scribes of the temple and instead toward the Son of Man who will gather the faithful into the “heavenly” kingdom. He tells them some of this will happen soon, but they should not look for signs and symbols. They will be able to sense when it’s about there.

So, what happens about 40 days later? Jesus hangs on the cross while the sun grows dark and the temple curtain is torn in two. What happens about 40 years later? The temple is destroyed by the Romans and the Jews are scattered to the four winds. Yes, the predictions and prophecies all come true but that’s not the point; it’s about the underlying message and it’s still relevant for us.

Trust in God. When things look dark, we are not to despair. We win in the end. God will be faithful and reward those who have faith in Him. Jesus Christ is the one who conquers darkness, even death. As Christians we must

not lose hope and it is our task to be light for those in the world that have not experienced the joy of the gospel: the merciful love of Jesus. So, we must not give in to the temptations nor the *darkness* we find in the world. We must burn with the light of Christ, so others can find hope. And that also means that whatever happens in the hierarchy of our Church, no matter how much some have failed in their duties and lives, we don't lose hope. Jesus Christ is the center of our Church and it's *here*, at this level, we experience him most intimately.

I thought it was interesting last week, when Father Tupper spoke for a few minutes at the end of Mass. (Recall Father Tom asked him to share a few words of wisdom from his 50+ years as a priest.) Father Dale basically said that it's essentially about what happens here, at the Mass, and on that altar, where we experience Christ in the ultimate communion.

Let's try to reflect on that this week and in the coming season of Advent. No matter how dark or cold (it seems), or how far we fall,

Christ conquers all.