

The 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Daniel 12:1-3

Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

Mark 13:24-32

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Somewhere deep inside one of the many science buildings at a great university, a young research student struggles with an apparatus, which simply refuses to work as it should. It's very late at night, but that hardly matters. The laboratory has no windows, and is bathed in artificial fluorescent daylight. Our student is faced with serious time constraints, and has been working ridiculously long hours. She's exhausted, frustrated, and tempted to sweep her experiment off the counter, and into the wastebasket. "Maybe," she thinks, "I ought to give all this up and become a ski instructor in Switzerland." But, in her heart, she knows she isn't going to do any such thing. Tomorrow, and the day after, she will be right here in the laboratory, looking after her experiment, just as she was yesterday, and the day before.

Faced with this uninspiring prospect, she puts her head down on her arms, falls asleep, and begins to dream. In her dream she sees a beautiful young man in a glistening white lab coat. He walks over to her, greets her by name, and says, "Don't be discouraged. One day you will make a discovery that will save thousands of lives. You will have the gratitude of people all over the world." When she hears these words, our student is delighted. When he sees her reaction, the young man hurriedly adds, "I'm afraid the news isn't all good. Your discovery will demand years of painstaking, disciplined research. You will ruin your eyesight with long

hours of study. Academic politics will delay the recognition you deserve. Your family will resent the hours you spend on your work, and you will break your leg in three places while snowboarding at Mt. Hood Meadows.

Our student is wise beyond her years. She responds to the young man, "Never mind all that. I'm still happy. These unpleasant things you mention, were bound to happen anyway. At least now I know that they will finally result in something marvelous. And when they occur, they will be evidence that your promise is true, and that I am closer to the day when I will make my wonderful discovery."

Our Church year is drawing to an end. Soon it will begin again with Advent, and then Christmas, and then the whole cycle of feasts and holidays will be repeated. But every time a liturgical year draws to a close, our readings remind us that the cycle will not go on forever, for us as individuals, or for the Church as a whole. One day it will all end. And it will end in a glorious reunion with Christ.

The Church conveys this Good News by means of apocalyptic accounts of the end of time. It can be difficult to recognize these accounts as Good News. They are full of predictions of persecutions, woes, scourges, cups of lamentation, and disasters. But anyone with experience of human life knows that cataclysms of one kind or another are bound to occur anyway. The role of the apocalyptic accounts in scripture is to assure us that the terrible things that happen need not fatally undermine our faith. They are accounted for, and are even, in some sense, signs of our imminent sharing in Christ's victory. This was true for early Christians as they faced the prospect of martyrdom for their faith. And it is true for us, as we watch the cable news channels. Ultimately, chaos and violence will not prevail. Victory will be ours, in

Christ.