

Sunday 1

A thousand years ago there was a popular song whose lyrics went like this: “Saturday night is the loneliest night of the week. I don’t mind Sunday nights at all for it is the night friends come to call, and Monday and Tuesday go fast, and another week has passed. But Saturday night is the loneliest night of the week.” Why? Well, I forget the rest of the lyrics but I think the singer of the song, let’s say a girl, is remembering that Saturday night was her date night, but her romance has now gone south. And that is why she is so sad. She sits alone, without her beau, on Saturday night.

But even those of us who are not in the dating game know that we have to have dates in our lives. We have to have something definite in the future. Otherwise our lives lose their color. Yes, we need something to look forward to. My grammar there is off. One should not end a sentence with a preposition. But the thought is right.

This is the way we humans function. And since that is so, we extrapolate our human need to our larger world and say that our world, our planet, our universe, must also have to have something to look forward to. The Jewish-Christian tradition embraces this

view of natural history. The world had a beginning and will have an end. There are other religions which think of the universe as a reality which expands and then contracts, repeating this movement eternally. Not so our tradition. The world began and will end.

Israel experienced many ups and downs in its national history, but it always returns to the belief that in the future all would be well for itself. That is what we see in our first reading today from Jeremiah who lived at the time of Israel's exile to Babylonia in the 6th century BC. Despite this defeat at the hands of the Babylonians Jeremiah preached that God would fulfill His promises to her. God will raise up a successor to King David and Jerusalem shall dwell secure, he writes.

In our Gospel today the Lord himself uses the language of his own tradition when it talks about events in the future, language which spoke of hurricanes and tsunamis, of stars falling and skies darkening. But then, like Jeremiah, the Lord in our Gospel today speaks of the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. For us this is confusing because we identify the Lord as the Son of Man. So is the Lord talking about himself here? It would seem so. Or so we have to interpret this passage because of our own identification of Jesus as the Son of Man. But, presuming that

we are on base here, we look to what is very important for us, namely, what we should do since the Son of Man is coming with power and great glory. What should we do? Jesus tells us: We should stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand.

To go back to our old song, we should be very happy because we have a date. On the last Saturday night, whether that is our personal last Saturday night or the world's, we should be happy because we have a date: The Lord is coming for us in power and glory.

But it is still Wednesday or Thursday. So what should we do now? Raise our heads and stand erect? Yes. But then our gospel for today has more definite instructions. Do not live a life of carousing and drunkenness. Do not be overcome by the anxieties of daily life. No. Instead, lead a life of watching, of vigilance and pray that God will give you the strength to overcome the trials of the moment.

That message could have been preached to Christians of every century in our past two-thousand year history. Indeed we believe it

was. Augustine must have preached it to the people in his congregations in the 400s. Is there anything new which should be included in this kind of preaching today? I believe there is. We are being warned that because of our new technical and scientific abilities we now have the power of so corrupting our environment that we can make our planet unfit for human habitation. I know nothing about science, but those who do tell us that we have about twelve years to make these necessary corrections. If we do not make them, then we will have done permanent damage to our environment. Life here for humans will be very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, this danger needs our attention. We are supposed to be the stewards of God's garden. We will be not be such if we do not listen to these warnings.

And so, as we celebrate this season of Advent, of waiting for the Lord, let us keep this new job in mind. That is the new element in our Saturday night date this year.