Spirituality
Scripture for Life



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"The days are coming!"

Like last week's celebration of Christ the King, today's Gospel gives us an apocalyptic vision amazingly applicable to our days. Lest we think we're unique, people throughout the ages have felt the same — and who's to say it's not true?

Jesus says, "People will die of fright!"

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Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Wow! Did you ever feel like that was happening? Maybe you didn't think you would die, but did you ever feel paralyzed, unable to reply or think of a way to deal with something? Then there's the depression and deception we feel when good people suffer, or when a young mother dies while her great-grandmother lies in bed wondering why God doesn't take her.

Moments like these lead some to abandon their faith. God has not met their expectations, so God, or at least a loving God, must not exist. In truth, the god who failed them does not exist. The god who rearranges reality for those who pray hard enough bears little resemblance to the God Jesus revealed. The god of slaves who tells people to suffer in silence, for their reward will be great in heaven, is not the God about whom Jesus preached. The "god of the gaps," the explanation for the incomprehensible, is not the God of Jesus. The god debunked by atheists like Richard Dawkins is more like a magician or an imaginary bodyguard than the God of Jesus.

Today's readings urge us to broaden our concept of God and God's involvement in history.

The Scriptures give witness that many people need to pass through periods of doubt to refine their sense of God. Might that be what Jesus was talking about when he said, "The powers of the heavens will be shaken"? Jesus experienced that himself, especially as he was suffering and dying. He called out, "My God! Why have you forsaken me?" In the depths of desolation and solitude, he called out to God who was not saving him in the way he hoped, yet who remained the God he loved and in

whom he believed.

Our reading from Jeremiah reiterates a typical prophetic promise: The God of justice will reign on this earth. How? Not by supernatural intervention nor by breaking the "laws of nature." Rather, God's justice will reign through people so open to inspiration that they allow the Spirit to move them in ways they had not imagined, the ones with enough faith to believe against all odds. These are the prophetic people through whom God transforms history.

Jesus told his disciples — including us — that when the nations are in dismay and even nature seems a traitor to life, redemption is right around the corner. When he said, "the powers of the heavens will be shaken," might he have been describing the death of our comfortable false gods? It can come to pass that everything we once believed will appear inadequate.

When all of that happens, Jesus says, "Stand erect! Raise your head! Your redemption is at hand!" This does not sound exactly like good news. Yet isn't the whole of the Gospel a promise of unanticipated and unimaginable transformations? Isn't the Gospel a call to turn our perspectives inside out?

Just after announcing redemption in the midst of tragedy and disorientation, Jesus tells us, "Do not let your hearts grow drowsy." Doesn't that sound like a warning to shun the attitude of "it is what it is"? Isn't Jesus asking us to feel it all with him and to let him work through us by putting God's saving love into action? Isn't he telling us that when we see tragedy, innocent suffering or a profusion of lies, our task is to pray for the strength to be signs of hope, witnesses to the fact evil will never triumph over good? Isn't he telling us that complacency will smother God's dream in our hearts?

As we begin Advent, perhaps we should reverse conventional thinking and consider that God is waiting for us more than we for God. Maybe God is waiting for us to allow grace to open and strengthen our hearts and minds. Maybe God is waiting for us to exercise the faith we need to pass through days of terrifying uncertainty and learn to believe in and love God who is bigger and different from what we expect.

Maybe Advent is all about discovering God waiting for us to perceive the "day of the Lord." It is at hand if only we will allow ourselves to perceive it.

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