Spirituality
Scripture for Life



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by Sr. Carol J. Dempsey

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First Sunday of Advent

December 2, 2018

Jeramiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25

1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

We are living in a time of global turmoil as we watch some democracies being taken apart while other ones erode socially, culturally and economically. As democracies come apart or falter, international world leaders scramble to figure out how to save the democratic system and its values, while thwarting off external and internal threats. At this time in the history of the world, the most urgent and dire threats to democracy are internal.

Nationalist and populist forces are gaining power and turning to autocratic behavior in such countries as Italy, Austria, Poland and the United States. People living in various democratic nations are expressing the view that their democratic governments are not serving them well.



(Mark Bartholomew)

International conversations such as those held at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit 2018 have called for world leaders who are social innovators as well as creative and concerned about the underrepresented. Because the planet and all communities of life are living in the midst of climate change that is wreaking havoc in many parts of the world, leaders will have to be people willing to make the just and ethical decisions needed to assure quality of life and sustainability for all creation. The needs are great; the demands are even greater; and the geopolitical and environmental crises are beyond human comprehension.

In ancient biblical times, people faced similar crises to those we face today. In the midst of wars, with empires usurping power and lands from one another, the Israelites looked for good and just leadership. In this Sunday's first reading, the biblical writer speaks about a divinely promised new leader who will do what is just and right and bring peace and security to the land of Israel and Judah.

In Psalm 25, the psalmist desires to know God's ways. This God whom the psalmist addresses is not only one to whom the psalmist can relate personally but also one whose paths are worthy to be followed. For the psalmist, justice, kindness and constancy characterize God's paths for those who walk in God's way — keeping the covenant and the divine decrees. Those who love God will also experience God's friendship. For the psalmist, then, the community is to follow the ways of God and not the ways of the corrupt leaders of the day.

The second reading focuses on the core element needed within the Christian community, and likewise, within the world today for the sake of the common good of all. This core element is love. Paul, the supposed author of this letter, defines for the Christian community a social and religious ideology that involves loving one another.

Christ has already attested to the way of love, and his followers have already received the apostolic directives. The Christian community is to lead by example, and their power as a group of people is to be transformative and not oppressive. In this way, others can experience the community's holiness and become the recipients of their loving actions.

The theme of redeeming and transformative power is the central message of Luke's Gospel. The Gospel writer envisions a time when the world will be turned upside down, signaled by cosmic events in the sun, moon and stars. Cosmic convulsions will accompany the coming of the divine one known as the Son of Man. Life as it is known will be changed, with judgment and redemption occurring simultaneously.

In sum, the readings invite us to ponder our world situation and our need for new kinds of leaders. An unwavering commitment to practicing justice complemented by love is the order of the day. Finally, as a Christian community called to live in communion with Christ, we are to be the embodiment of the redeeming powers of the divine one, shaking up the world as we confront the powers of human oppression.

The time of realized eschatology is now, and today begins the spirit of the second coming. Are we ready to participate in the mission?

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Editor's note: *This Sunday Scripture commentary was originally published in the December 2018 issue of NCR's sister publication Celebration, a comprehensive pastoral resource. To read the full version of the commentary, click here. Sign up to receive weekly Scripture for Life emails.*

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