Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

November 22, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Teacher, when will this happen?” (Luke 21:7).

Dn 2:31-45: Luke 21:5-11

Daniel interprets the dream of the king of Babylon by predicting that subsequent kingdoms would weaken, using the image of a huge statue with a golden head, silver chest and arms, bronze waist, iron legs and feet of mixed clay and iron. While flattering Nebuchadnezzar as the golden head, Daniel is also giving him a history lesson about the nature of earthly power, which never lasts as conquest and corruption inevitably bring down the powerful. The phrase “feet of clay” has survived in modern parlance as a reminder that even great empires fall, and proud rulers are always toppled.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus shocks an audience expressing awe over the temple in Jerusalem, regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world for its immense size and beauty, by predicting it would be razed to the ground. It was unthinkable that this symbolic “house of God on earth” would ever fall, though this is exactly what happened during the Jewish-Roman war in 70 CE.

For Jews of the time, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple had an apocalyptic impact that felt like the end of the world. We might compare it to the shockwaves that followed 9-11, when the twin towers collapsed, the Pentagon was attacked and, even more so, had the White House or Capitol also been destroyed by additional fuel-laden airliners during the assault on the United States.

Luke’s Gospel, composed after the destruction of Jerusalem, affirms Jesus’ apocalyptic warnings about the end of the world, though his words may also have

applied to the Zealots who were trying to stir up open rebellion against the Roman occupation during Jesus' time. "See that you not be deceived,

for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them!"

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he was pleading with the nation's leaders not to expect God to sanction or support such a revolt, knowing the catastrophic loss of life and violence that would follow. History records the failure of many nations to resist war mongering and apocalyptic preachers who have deceived with promises of divine rescue for their followers. The Book of Revelation, which has fueled so many endtime movements, was written to anticipate the triumph of Christianity and the fall of Rome, depicted symbolically as the "whore of Babylon."

In this final week of the church year, the Lectionary will continue to offer endtime readings. These ominous themes in their own way prepare us the First Sunday of Advent. No matter what terrors and threats history throws our way, there is always a new beginning, a vision of hope, because God is at work even through adversity. The rituals of Advent, like evergreen wreaths and lighted candles, family gatherings and the anticipation of children, focus us on a better future through renewal and love. That renewal comes with the birth of Jesus, God entering human history.

Advertisement