

Homily, St. Andrew's
Reign of Christ "B", Nov 22, 2015
Rev 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

The movie *Mockingjay, Part 2* was released this weekend. No, I haven't been to see it yet, but I hope to sometime in the next few weeks. It is the last movie in *The Hunger Games* saga... first a hit teen fiction trilogy and now a set of movies as well. Like the *Divergent* series, *The Hunger Games* is set in a post-apocalyptic dystopia. A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia... it's a frightening, not-good-place often characterized by dehumanization, totalitarian governments and environmental disaster. It is also a genre of literature popular particularly among youth. The stories are post-apocalyptic in that some major, devastating war had taken place sometime in the past and a new society was constructed to fix the problems of the old one and ensure that such major conflict would never happen again. But when we enter these worlds, the formerly "new societies" are untenably oppressive. While the details vary, the very, very basic plot involves young people in these difficult, oppressive future-worlds rebelling, fighting to unmask the rules and rulers of their world, so that something new can emerge. The hope is that if the dystopia falls, something better... perhaps not a utopia but at least something better, can be born. And so post-apocalyptic become pre-apocalyptic as the old crumbles and the new begins to emerge.

Today we celebrate "the Reign of Christ." It is the festival that marks the last Sunday after Pentecost and the end of the Christian year. This is the Sunday when the focus of the Christian year - the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - becomes the sharpest with the culmination of this story we find ourselves in. It is the time when we look to "the end," to when the Reign of Christ is completed and the end of the age comes with the fulfilment of the promise that Christ will return. It is a day when what was new - the new life that came to us at Easter - comes to an end and we are invited to look squarely at the apocalypse. If Christ comes today to reign in power and glory, what dystopia... what unpleasantness, what oppression, what difficulty could end, so that something better, can be born? If we fight to unmask the rules and rulers of our broken world, could something new emerge?

A few minutes ago we heard the introduction to the Revelation to John. Revelation is an enigmatic biblical book that looks squarely at the end, using the dramatic literary form of an apocalypse. This literary form comes from a Greek word meaning "revelation" and generally involves a first person account of revelatory visions of a future or heavenly world, that is often sharply contrasted with the present evil age. John's Apocalypse reads like a story - like perhaps a Steven King novel - and is heavily laden with metaphor that allows the exploration of difficult and painful realities in the present time. In the case of Revelation, the struggles of the present time had to do with severe persecutions of Christian communities in the mid to late first century. It contains within it both a severe condemnation of the authorities of the day - the Caesars and other Roman elite, who cause misery for many, and a vision of a glorious future with a different

world - in highly potent and image intense metaphoric language.

In the introduction that we heard today, John describes God twice as “the one who is and who was and who is to come...” along with God’s declaration that: “I am the Alpha and Omega.” God is timeless; God is in all time, at both the beginning and end of the short passage we heard today, and also at the beginning and end of the book as a whole. The description of God as “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,” is repeated twice at the end of the book. Such a view of the timelessness of God is an ancient one, going back in the biblical story to the name God self-discloses to Moses in Exodus 3.

But here in Revelation, the timelessness of God is also applied to Christ: Jesus Christ is “the one who is and who was and who is to come.” Throughout the church year we live the story of Jesus Christ as we practice “anamneis” - the act of collapsing time through the remembrance of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. We live it out in our communal worship and in our everyday life together through the stories we hear again and again, in our sacramental life, and in the acts of mercy and love we offer to one another and to the wider community.

Through the Christian year, we come to understand the Jesus Christ who **was** in the incarnation... the mysterious combination of the human and the divine, coming as a baby and living as a man who taught and loved and who lived and died. We understand the Jesus Christ who **is** in the resurrection... the mysterious on-going life of God in the community of faith - this community of saints, that we name as “the Body of Christ,” and of which we are members. We understand the Jesus Christ who **is to come** in our dreams of a better world, a glorious coming again, a heavenly realm... the mysterious and unknown future, within and beyond our imaginings, where God already is, ready to meet us. “Anamnesis” is the act of remembering all of this, of bringing all time into this moment, of living all of it - God’s incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and dreaming for the future - here and now, in this community, at this time.

So why apocalypse? If time is collapsed into One in God, why do we need to look at the end? Surely such visions are just imaginings... fanciful musings of a few crazies who we would rather not be associated with! Why apocalypse? Because though God may be eternal and timeless, our lives are not. And there is nothing like a deadline to help get things done! The flip side of apocalypse - of staring into the end of the world as we know it, and imaging a different world - is hope. It is not a flimsy, other-worldly or romantic hope, but rather one with flesh and feet, a beating heart and weeping eyes.

Our apocalyptically inclined popular culture can teach us something about active, alive and risky hope. In all of the most popular teen fictions series, heroes and heroines know that there is nobody else to hold back the forces of evil, and so they must. When Harry Potter is still in the throes of grief at his mentor Dumbledore’s death, he remembers Dumbledore’s urging from an earlier time: “he and Dumbledore had discussed fighting a losing battle... It was important, Dumbledore said, to fight, and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then could evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated...” He has great personal responsibility, and yet Harry also recognizes that he has never really been alone... he has lived out his calling, his vocation, only because of the support and help of his friends and family who love him. The same is true of heroines Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, and Tris in *Divergent*. In every case, the main characters know that if they truly want a different world - a world of equality and wholeness, freedom and opportunity - then it is up to them to make the change.

These fictional characters can teach us something about hope because they don't get lost in a feeling, or in waiting on some other-worldly force to magically make everything better. It's ironic, considering that Harry Potter's world *is* a magical world! The hope lies in the actions of the characters... it is as these characters faithfully live out their various callings that the miraculous happens - totalitarian regimes collapse and new societies begin to emerge.

Jesus Christ, the one whose eternal Reign we celebrate today, also acted faithfully. In our Gospel today, Jesus responds to Pilate's questioning by saying: "My kingdom is not from this world... my kingdom is not from here." Jesus uses words and concepts that Pilate... and everyone... knows. It is potently political language that Jesus twists around to point to something different, something new. Kings rule with military might. Kings use coercive power and violence to maintain their position. Kings are rich, living in palaces paid for by the hard labour of peasants who pay crushing taxes. And yet in teaching and preaching, in healing and in acts of mercy, Jesus strives to show a different kind of power and a different kind of rule. "My kingdom is not from this world... my kingdom is not from here."

Jesus acted faithfully and as members of the Body of Christ, we too are called to be faithful witnesses, to accept the responsibility of our various vocations, and to work with God to bring about a new world. Relationships are not magically healed, but true and lasting reconciliation, peace, is possible when we risk setting aside our anger and pain and trust God's power to heal. If we fight to unmask the rules and rulers of our world, perhaps something new can emerge. The hope is that if the dystopia falls - if suffering, war, oppression, fear, poverty, hatred... anything and everything that is death-making - if our dystopia falls, something better can be born. The new world we anticipate today in Jesus' coming again, the kingdom of God, is already present with us wherever we find the love of community and whenever we care for the less fortunate; forgive those who hurt us; or, understand those who are different from us.

The Christian story ends today with a glorious future...

it is a future, a peace, we need now!

May Christ's Reign come – may it come soon...