

Sunday.33

Don't look now, but another year has passed, and we are one year, one month and two weeks away from completing the first decade of the 21st century, a fact which is shocking to those of us who have lived most of our lives in the 20th century. In fact, we can imagine young people looking at us and whispering to themselves: "These people belong to the last century!" And we do!

Endings, whether of a life or a day, can mean different things to different people. Some people don't mind the fact that here in New England the days grow short at this time of year. It is already dark by five o'clock. For them it means there is more time for enjoying the warmth of their home with a fire. For others these small comforts cannot compare with the long, sunlit evenings of early summer.

Liturgically we are at the end of the year, and the readings chosen for these last Sundays are taken from those parts of the Scripture which are called apocalyptic because they depict the end times when the world as we know it will be destroyed and good will triumph. Our first reading for today is from the apocalyptic Book

of Daniel, and our Gospel for today is from chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel which is also apocalyptic in character.

Apocalyptic books tend to emerge in times of crisis, and their message is like the one a parent gives to a frightened child: "It's ok. You'll be fine soon." They preach hope to people in a time of crisis. The Jewish people have often been in crisis. In the two centuries preceding our Lord's birth they were subjects of the Greeks and the Romans. So they needed to be told that God had not abandoned them: "It's ok. You will be fine soon." Mark's Gospel was written in the late sixties to reassure the Christians at that time that the difficulties they were experiencing would not last forever and that they would survive them. Indeed, according to Mark, the present trials are a sign that the Lord is at hand, and that is good news. Mark uses the image of the coming of spring to make his point. When trees begin to bloom, you know that spring is near. So too, when these difficulties arise, you can be sure that the Son of Man, that is, the risen Lord Jesus, is coming.

Do we need this reassurance today? The answer to that question on an individual level can be given by each of us. Are we personally in crisis? If so, then today's readings want to assure us that everything will be fine. God is our parent who says to us individually: "It's ok. You'll be fine." And all of us can bear witness to the fact that this is the truth. We have been through a few crises in our lives, and we are still standing, still moving on.

Are we in crisis as a church? Well, not more than usually, someone could say. But more so, it seems to me personally, than we were in at the time of the Second Vatican Council and for some years following it. Those were times of great joy and promise. Are we in crisis as a nation? Yes, people are out of work, people are losing their homes, and we are fighting a war. Are we in a crisis as a world? Yes, there are pirates, wars and corruption in governments. Not a pretty picture. Nevertheless, our God says to the world: "It's ok. You'll be fine."

Our diocese is embarking on a program of evangelization. Soon we will see advertisements on the television and on billboards inviting people to learn about the Catholic Church or welcoming back those who were but no longer are practicing Catholics. And why should

we not do that? We have a wonderful product to sell: our belief in a God who is both father and mother to us and is always saying to us: "It's ok. You'll be fine." That is the Good News we preach, the evangelium, which means precisely that, Good News.

If we as a church and as individuals live out of that Good News, our lives and our personalities will be flooded with peace, hope, and love. We will be billboards inviting people in and through our lives to share our vision, our hope, for ourselves and our world.

Many today have no hope for the future; some, on a personal level; others, on all sorts of level. They do not believe the world has a future, or if it does, it will one day end. We too believe it will end, but its end will be its future, its permanent future when everything will be bathed in the light and love of the infinite God and his Son, the man Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, in him everything is ok and we will be fine.