



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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Sunday, November 16, 2003
The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

*Choral Eucharist
at 11am*

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
Daniel 12:1-13
Saint Mark 13:14-23

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JESUS – GOD’S APOCALYPSE

*And there shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation even to the same time;
and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This Sunday, if we were to name it, might be *Apocalypse* Sunday.

Both our lessons, from the vision at the end of the Book of Daniel and Jesus’ prophecy just before his Passion in the Gospel of Saint Mark, are *apocalyptic*. Daniel sees a progression of invader empires overwhelming the Holy Land. Jesus predicts the Roman destruction of the Temple. The word, Apocalypse, means Revelation. Apocalyptic means having to do with revelation. Now there is a general sense in which all of Holy Scripture is a revelation. It is God’s Word written, as our Church’s Articles of Religion say. But there is a more particular sense of Apocalypse associated with the Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament which also is a revelation of The End. It is, if you will, the revelation of all revelation. The graphic scenes of crisis and judgment, of the separation of good from evil, of devils from angels, of the righteous from the unrighteous – with the monsters and beasts on one side and the saints and the Mystic Lamb of God on the other side – reveal, or uncover, once and for all, the great drama of life that has been going on all along.

Both Daniel and Jesus refer to apocalyptic historical moments that God’s people will have to undergo. These are great times of trouble and testing, of the collapse of the world order before the judgment of God. Every age, if you think about it, has these moments: wars, plagues, great disasters; the sudden end of an era, the conquest of a nation, or the fall of an empire. The movie, *Apocalypse Now*, revealed the horrors of the war in Vietnam. A more peaceful and therefore in its way more amazing Apocalypse was the sudden collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989; the whole world changed in a few months without a shot being fired. Then of course there is 9/11. These are apocalypses, revelations that expose and lay bare fallen human life in this world – its manifold kingdoms and systems, its religions and idolatries, its sham and pretense, its injustice and cruelty – and in contrast manifest the power, the glory, the truth and the goodness of God.

Apocalypses are also personal and biographical as well as corporate and historical. A crisis comes – a loss, an illness, a financial setback, a death – which reveals and uncovers the true character, the authentic spirit and soul, of a person; sometimes for some or even all to see but certainly for the individual to experience in the presence of God (whether he knows or believes in God or not).

While these apocalypses reveal things, life goes on. As the angel told Daniel, “Many shall be purified and made white and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.” So it goes, to this very hour.

Then what about the end, by which I mean THE END? That is a good question. On the one hand, Holy Scripture, even at its most apocalyptic moments, above all Jesus Christ himself, warns us not to look to days or times or seasons; not to calculate the end-time. Yet Holy Scripture does point to an END, to closure, as does Mother Nature. You and I will come to an end in death. Not a man, woman or child here is likely to be breathing and walking on the earth in a hundred years; yours truly and most of the rest of you have a lot less time than that! Death is a commonplace; yet each singular, personal death is truly an awesome event, an apocalypse of its own before God. The earth whose air we breathe and whose bounty sustains us, the sun which comes forth as a “bridegroom out his chamber and rejoices as a giant to run his course,” have a limit to their existence. The very cosmos, just as it has an *Alpha*, has a corresponding *Omega*.

All biblical, Christian apocalyptic adds one more essential item. That is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, as the beginning and the end of human life. There are titles for Jesus’ revelation of his Person and Work: Christ, Son of man, Son of God, King, Shepherd, Lord, Judge, even (most revealing) God; certainly also God the Word, God the Image, God the Only-Begotten, of God. What this means is that when all is said and done, as it certainly shall be, there remains God’s self-revelation, his Personal Disclosure, his own Apocalypse in Jesus Christ. The Gospel says that revelation came in scandalous, almost unbelievable, humility (actually humiliation) on the Cross, which was the Apocalypse of all that Jesus was, said, and did throughout his incarnation. The Gospel also says that he will “come again in power and great triumph to judge the world.” What that means is that the scandal, the humility of God and his love for us on the Cross will, when all has been said and done in God’s good time, be revealed, manifested, and thereby vindicated for all to see:

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him...and when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore...” (Rev. 1:7-18)

So, Dearly Beloved, at the heart of all apocalypses (no matter how fearful or trying) is the Love of God whose very image was etched in flesh and blood by Jesus of Nazareth. He came out of love for us; he died; and behold, he lives! When things fall apart and time runs out, his love remains and his eternity breaks in. The word to us is – wake up and live; watch and pray! Christ truly is the living End in whom there is an entire new Heaven and Earth, a City of God, where we will at last be home, safe and sound, forever.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.