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C-28, Track One
Is 65:17-25, Canticle 9,
II Thess 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19

Divine Recycling

As the days shorten, and the light dims, the Church year winds down, and the Sunday readings speak more and more of endings. Just as the days darken, so do the scriptures. Today we hear a lot about warnings and a lot about hope. In Luke, Jesus says: "As for these things that you see, the days will come when ... all will be thrown down," but he goes on to say: "Do not be terrified ... this will give you an opportunity to testify." ... which is to say, an opportunity to speak the truth. WHAT is he talking about here? In the face of calamity what is there other than futility? But that is not his point, because you see, behind all biblical apocalyptic prophecy there is always a vision of HOPE.

THAT hope is beautifully drawn by Isaiah, when he proclaims God's new vision for a just and merciful age. God says, "I am about to CREATE new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered ... but be GLAD and REJOICE in what I am creating." And in our canticle today, which is also from Isaiah, we are reminded that "it is GOD who saves;" nothing else -- and no one else -- is our defense.

What the Bible describes as *apocalypse* has very little to do with what our popular books and movies call apocalyptic. Biblical apocalypse is less about catastrophes and endings, and more about REVEALING a NEW WAY OF BEING in the world. And so, whenever we encounter apocalyptic language in the Bible, we should wonder: WHAT are these words trying to reveal? What do the described events SAY about us, about the world, or about God? WHENEVER we see or experience great

events, or great tragedies, we become WITNESSES to an apocalyptic TRUTH, which is to say a REVEALED HOPE that is beyond anything we can possibly see today. But remember one thing: hope is not optimism. Optimism is an attitude. Hope is a choice.

As 2025 passes away, we can see many great things happening around us. Some are amazing advances in science (like precision gene therapies and cancer vaccines) and brave new worlds of meaning (like artificial intelligence). Some are terrifying traumas in the fabric of the environment and our way of life (like the convulsions of our climate and our economy). Whatever is going on, we are now living deeply into a time of disruption. We have all the tools to make a wonderful success of it, but clearly our ethics reveal a gaping chasm between what we hope, and what we have. It is in THAT SPACE, THAT CHASM, where biblical apocalypse finds its rightful place: between what we have and what we hope.

Wherever you find this type of literature in the Bible, whether in Isaiah, Daniel, the Gospels, or Revelation, apocalyptic prophecy shows up whenever HOPE seems to be unthinkable. It shows up when natural ecosystems fail. It shows up when government and economic systems collapse. It shows up when cultural and religious supports crumble. It shows up when HOPE is not only in short supply, but in NO supply.

When everything around us says life is ending, and love is over, when all WE CAN SEE is destruction, the Spirit of God reminds us that we are LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACES for safety and security. In our day and age, we believe strongly in our own capacity to build a better mouse trap, but in the end it will not be enough. When it fails, some of us keep believing that we just need to try a little harder, to wait for a better day. Here the scriptures remind us that “a little harder” won’t deliver the better day we need. As Isaiah says, “It is GOD who saves,” ... not a better mouse trap.

What we see around us often makes no sense. But God is continually taking these things that make no sense, and turning them toward a future well-being that we CANNOT presently imagine. There is a kind of divine RECYCLING going on with all that is painful in our bones, senseless to our minds, or brutal for our hearts. It is a recycling far more thorough and complete than OUR halting attempts. Because when everything around us cries *the end* -- God is still creating, still giving life, still pulling RESURRECTION out of despair. This is beyond our present understanding, and it is beyond the present capacity of our hearts too. But GOD's understanding, and GOD's heart, are big enough to take in all our tears, all our questions, and all our anger. There is no BLASPHEMY in bringing those to God; because your tears, your questions, and your anger WILL be transformed, RECYCLED if you will, in Christ's creative hands, heart, and mind.

It may be impossible to see this from OUR point of view. But apocalypse stands behind everything in our lives. It is just that we usually cannot stand to have the curtain pulled back. Waiting for, or second guessing, the end-of-days is really a pointless thing. Because God's revelation, Christ's apocalypse, is always right behind the curtain of our everyday lives. It does not matter if today is THE last day, if today is OUR last day, or if today is just ANY OLD day. God's apocalypse is right there, under the surface, waiting for us to see it. The Spirit is there: receiving our tears, cherishing our questions, bearing our anger; and in ALL of this, Christ is recycling and renewing us in unimaginable ways.