

You are no doubt familiar with the word Apocalypse. Common place in films and books and even in our news headlines the word conjures up now established images of destruction and catastrophe. When all the signs are ominous we acknowledge a situation is assuming apocalyptic proportions. The Biblical apocalypse is a concept which somehow haunts the minds and imaginations of even the least religious amongst us (which is rather strange in fact). This morning we have read one of the passages in the Bible which animates this theme. The Gospel writer, Mark, talks of a time where the predictions of the prophet Isaiah will be fulfilled as 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'. So today's reading reminds us that Jesus is an apocalyptic figure. Christianity is an apocalyptic religion. Indeed Advent is an apocalyptic season.

But what does all this really mean?

Originally, at its Greek roots, the word apocalypse simply means to reveal. To disclose or unveil. It's essential theme with reference to the future is that 'what has been hidden will be brought to light'. This revealing is the simple message of apocalypse, and the surrounding images and messages of fear and trembling and distress are assumed to be in response to the revealing and disclosing of that which we have hidden in this world. The Bible's message is that all will be uncovered and the world's response is shame and fear.

It is a difficult, but vital, message that the future holds within it a Time of Reckoning. A Time we are told when a great reversal is coming - the weak will be made strong. The meek will inherit the earth. The pure in heart will see God. God will reach into history to tear everything up by the roots, and this will comfort the suffering and reward the poor but also expose the greedy and pacify the violent. In truth the shame and fear we associate with this moment of revelation is only inherently human in as far as greed and violence are inherently human. Disclosure is a neutral notion ... it depends on what is hidden as to whether it creates joy or fear.

Advent then is of grave importance to an apocalyptic faith. Because advent, the preparation, is what defines whether apocalypse, the disclosing, is joyful or fearful. For our faith to find its true meaning and power we must trust in the power of both seasons .. the preparation and the revelation. Without the final disclosure all our preparation and hard work of faith is pointless. Without our preparation and hard work the final uncovering is fearful and worrying. When we are committed to both the preparation and the completion and revealing, the Advent and the Apocalypse, then our life finds wholeness and satisfaction.

At Advent we start to look forward. We do so in anticipation of an Apocalypse. A great disclosure of all that is hidden. As the prophets and priests of the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the light of the Messiah so we too look forward to a future moment of salvation achieved through the life, death and resurrection of that same Messiah. Christ the Light who has overcome the darkness. Let us take the Advent message to heart so that in the midst of our current fears and anxieties we might live lives that make the words of Mark's Gospel words of joy and peace rather than distress and trembling. Christ is coming to judge the living and the dead ... let us say Alleluia, Maranatha come Lord Jesus!