

The gospel passage from Saint Mark, today, focuses on the Apocalypse. The Church calls this style of writing apocalyptic text. It seeks to forecast end times. It was an attempt at prophecy, prophecy of turmoil and tribulation, death and destruction for those who were not Christian, because the sinner must be punished and the saint saved. It was this type of thinking that brought the Church into its first major crises, a crisis that shattered faith. You see, the Church, in the early days, expected the world to soon end, and Christians believed that Christ would come back for the second time and usher in the everlasting reign of God on this earth. In the process, evil would be eradicated and the world would live in perfect harmony forever and ever. The Church believed that this "Second Coming" was just around the corner. They believed that if they could just hold out and avoid death during the persecutions, they would be physically alive when Jesus came again. The Second Coming became the focus of hope in the earliest days of the Church, and when it didn't happen, as forecast, the Church plunged into a crisis of faith.

We can smile at what seems, to us, simplistic hope. And, we can wonder what significance passages, such as the one we have today, have for us in today's world. But reality is that our world, today, is just as chaotic as the first century, and in many ways it is much more dangerous. I think that only the naïve are unconcerned; for some, fear is the only sanity. But, biblical apocalyptic writing, though centered in crisis, is not about fear and despair; in truth, it is about hope. Hope comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and Christian hope transcends time. Even though the passage we've read, today, was addressed to people of an earlier day, the message is equally for us. Christian hope never ends. Christian hope is like Christian love. St. Paul once said that there is nothing that love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith and its endurance. The same is true of Christian hope, for hope is grounded in the enduring, eternal love of God the Father for his Creation. In Christian faith, we know that Christ Jesus came into this world for our salvation. In the face of all chaos, God's love, in Christ, prevails. Hope is a state of mind; it is not the state of the world. Hope is confidence in God. Hope understands that in God, good does prevail. Hope is the source of all courage.

If St. Mark's passage this morning says anything to us, it says that there will always be a tomorrow in which God reigns and even though the world is not constant and the future is unknown and therefore uncertain, God is constant and God consistently and constantly loves. God does not change. We do not know what tomorrow brings, but of this we can be certain: there is a day after tomorrow and that day is God's day. Christ reigns and in Christ we have redemption. The immediate future of our trials may be developing, but the outcome is a given. Christ reigns. Our Lords' promise to us is that he is with us forever. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. In Christ, all is well. *Amen.*