

Homily — 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B 2018
Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS

I suspect that most of us church-goers at this time of the year would just as soon tune out today's readings ... or stay at home.
They sound so grim and dark, even threatening.

Our first reading speaks about a time unsurpassed in stress.
The Gospel speaks of a time of "tribulation and darkness,"
when the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

So, here are few statistics that sort of bring talk of tribulation and darkness right up to date:

- The human population of our world today is approximately 7.3 billion — remember a billion is 1,000 million.
- About 3 billion (3,000 million) people lack adequate nutrition.
- Every three days, more people die from malnutrition and disease than died from the atom bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945.
- Every year more people die from preventable hunger than died in the years of the Holocaust.
- One out of every four human beings has no access to safe drinking water (2 billion — 2,000 million).
- More than half of the world's adult population cannot read or write.
- About 4 million people died in wars in the 18th century; about 100 million people died in wars in the 20th century.
- Here's a macro-statistic that can be at least remotely distressing:
Our most crucial star, the sun, has about 5 billion more years to go.
After that, it will expand enormously and then burn,
taking its planets, including Earth, along with it into oblivion.

So what's a believer to do in the face of all that grim, dark and threatening stuff?

Let me suggest that besides confronting us with grimness, the darkness, the readings today also point us in a direction that is meant to instill courage and hope in us.

In the first reading, beside speaking of doom and gloom,
we are assured that
"the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of a star-lit night,
and those who lead many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

So, just how do we, puny as we are, get wisdom,
how do we lead the many to justice?

Ah, we Christians have the key to that — the Holy Spirit —
who St. Paul assures us has been "lavished on us"
because of our intimate union with the risen Christ.

In today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews, we heard that Jesus has taken his place at God's side forever and that we who have been consecrated into his body through baptism are made perfect forever.

That means that we who are engaged in this life's battles now are assured that victory will be ours in the end.

In the Gospel, Jesus just said to us "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."
And just what are his words?

Jesus is the embodiment of God's word.
and that word is God's unending, unconditional love for us all.
Because we have been incorporated into the body of Christ,
we become the instruments of God's wisdom and justice here and now.

Rev. Dennis Hamm, a Jesuit, suggests that we have been placed on this Earth, as housekeepers,
attending God's creation and God's people.
That requires God's wisdom and a deep sense of what is just
— and what ain't just.

Here is a recent example of how I think it plays out today.
You may disagree with me but please hear me out.

I am very troubled right now because it has become OK
for a person in the position of the president of the United States
to tell a reporter in a very public forum that she asked a "stupid question."

I believe our words matter.
Words can either lift people up or demean them.
I'm sure some will say, "she deserved it."

Here's my take: When you're clearly in a position of power over another person, as the president is in those situations, that looks like bullying to me.
I think it's abusive,
and yet more and more acceptable.
And among other things, I think it runs the danger of saying
to people who lack some self-control,
"go ahead, say or do whatever's on your mind; it doesn't matter."

As Abraham Lincoln reminded us, we live in a country where government is of the people and by the people and for the people.
That means, I believe, that wisdom and justice demand that we scour our hearts to find reasonable ways to address such issues
. . . and MANY others, of course.

**I want to conclude with some wise words from Eleanor Stump,
who teaches philosophy at St. Louis University.
She says: ". . . The [apparent] losing which is the cross,
the willingness to be hated and afflicted for the sake of justice
is the way to the final winning
where God's people shine with the splendor of the stars."**