February 4, 2018
Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

By Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem.

The new year is still fresh in our consciousness. For social action leaders in the Church, we realize that an election year is a “shortened year” to accomplish our social policy agenda. The President and Congress seem to have a shorter attention span to advance policy initiatives, as they are consumed by campaigning and worry about voters’ ballot casting being overly influenced by the most recently passed bill.

Nevertheless, today’s First Reading resonates with an article that I recently read in the Washington Post, “America’s chaotic, crazy, challenging, great, tumultuous, horrible, disappointing year.” Scott Clement, Emily Guskin, and Shelly Tan write in part, “...In response to a direct question, almost 7 in 10 Americans said it was a good year [2017] for them personally. But a 58 percent majority said 2017 was a bad year [2017] for the country overall. Majorities similarly deemed it a bad year for America’s role in the world, race relations, media coverage, the U.S. political system and the president. Given those sentiments, it’s not surprising that a 66 percent majority indicated that the country is going in the wrong direction....”

Job speaks of life being filled with drudgery, misery, and restlessness. He is as gloomy as to conclude, “I shall not see happiness again,” (Job 7:7). How do we preach the “Joy of the Gospel” to parishioners, students, or brothers and sisters in our religious communities during a time of such angst due to civil discord (and even downright nastiness) among varying ideologies, the worst world refugee crisis since World War II, and a twelve month period of historic natural calamity due to droughts, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires that affected nearly every continent?

Perhaps St.Teresa of Calcutta would have advised Job, as she has advised us, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop”; “God doesn't require us to succeed, he only requires that you try”; “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples”; and “If you can't feed a hundred people, feed just one”.

Steve is a member of St. Norbert Abbey, De Pere, Wisconsin. He regularly comments on Catholic social action in local publications and is employed by the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Green Bay and the Bay Area Community Council.