Dec. 2, 2018 | First Sunday of Advent

Jer 33:14-16/1
Thes 3:12—4:2
Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

By Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem.

As a first year theology student at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), I had an eight month ministry practicum on the Outreach Team at St. Victor Catholic Church, Calumet City (Indiana). After the team was solicited for assistance, members intervened with family members and coworkers to help a loved one admit his or her addiction (to alcohol, narcotics, or prescription drugs) and begin to recover through in patient or outpatient services, AA, or other possible solutions. My classmates and I learned the meaning of the concept “hitting rock bottom”; that is, an individual will not admit his or her sickness and seek help until her or she has experienced the greatest amount of pain possible. To hit “rock bottom” is to reach lows that cannot be exceeded.

Today’s Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent also describes conditions which appear to be beyond “the point of no return”:

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars,
and on earth nations will be in dismay,
perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright
in anticipation of what is coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21: 25-26)

Our Church and world are in very precarious situations. The Church’s power and sex abuse crisis is upsetting thousands of clergy and lay people; many hold that it will bring upon historic change in the institutional Church. The number of people fleeing their homes due to famine, violence, and poverty is at post World War II high. Fires, floods, and hurricanes are producing storms of the “century” on a regular basis, wiping out peasants’ fields, destroying people’s homes, etc. Federal government officials are clamping down on free speech while attempting to prevent unpopular journalists from speaking truth to power. It is times like these in which I remember one of my mom’s “Clare-isms,” “I’m glad that I don’t have to raise kids today.”

As the Jewish people expected great calamity before the coming of the Son of God, we too may take heart, searching for and finding a silver lining during these challenging times. As the addict is most likely to succumb for help when feeling the sickest, we too must rise to the occasion when our Church and world seem to be most broken and beyond help.

To repeat a slogan from our high school weight room’s walls, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

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