Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle C

St. Mary’s, 2022

For five Sundays in a row

Roman Catholic worshipers are alternately

enriched and bewildered

by selections from the Book of Revelation

chosen for our second reading

throughout this Easter Season,

the only such time readings from this Book

are scheduled to grace our Sunday gatherings.

This Book is part of that genre known as apocalyptic literature,

a highly symbolic style of writing

that foretells of supernaturally inspired cataclysmic events

signaling an end time or a turning point in history.

Written during a time of intense persecution for Christians,

the Book was intended to encourage the faithful

to stand firm in the face of this serious threat,

promising that in this cosmic showdown

between good and even

Christ’s reign will triumph over satanic forces

and an eternity of grace and glory will open to all believers.

While many worshippers may not be deeply inspired

and some may even be confused

by this kind of biblical literature

broadly speaking the genre

is actually quite popular in our culture.

We don’t call it apocalyptic literature, however,

But disaster movies.

From “Armageddon” to “The Towering Inferno”

“The Perfect Storm” to the “Poseidon Adventure”

“Independence Day” to the recent “Moonfall”

Audiences in our own country and seemingly around the world

revel in these and similar tales

of threatening natural disasters and alien invasions

global catastrophes and interplanetary battles

and pay big bucks to watch

Masters of the universe and Jedi Knights outwit evil

heroes and heroines turn back the tides of nature

or some ragtag collection of unlikely collaborators

restore tranquility to a threatened universe.

But since lectionary passages are not selected

for their enduring entertainment value,

nor liturgically crafted to inject a few thrills

into our otherwise placid worship

we may have to look for a different entry point

for discerning the contribution

of this string of apocalyptic visions

to our own lives and society

with their alternately ominous and promising message.

Having visions is not ordinarily something

most of us either experience or place much credence in.

As the person charged by my order

To promote the canonization of Blessed Solanus Casey

Who was beatified in 2017

I hear many stories of healings received through his intercession

And the occasional letter or email

Reporting a vision, even message from the holy man

My theological training makes me skeptical of such reports

But my own spiritual longings makes me wonder:

after all, if Gabriel could announce a pending birth

to a young peasant girl in Ancient Israel;

if mystics such as Francis of Assisi could experience

the presence of a six-winged Seraph

whose appearance coincided

with the gift of the stigmata;

and if the great Native American medicine man, Black Elk

Whose cause for canonization is now open,

Could as a 9-year-old

Have celebrated visions that were

A life-long source of mission for him

Why not embrace what the theologian Karl Rahner

Called the mysticism of daily living

And, in particular, ponder these biblical visions

As a compelling source of mission for us.

We might even contemplate our Christian responsibility

To nurture such visions in our own lives.

The famed founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud,

developed a theory of dreams that contended

that unconscious visions were actually

disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes,

driven by suppressed aggression

and other unfulfilled longings.[[1]](#endnote-1)

While his dream theories have largely been debunked

Freud gave contemporary science a basis for caution

or even downright distain

for dreams or visions or parallel experiences

of phantasms, angels or other spirits.

Ironically, contemporary leadership and management theories

emphasize with unrelenting zeal

how important it is

to have a vision, a vision statement[[2]](#endnote-2)

an imagined direction and a construed path forward

for individual leaders and companies of every size

if they are going to be successful.

Such a vision is not understood to be

some kind of dreaming completely unmoored from reality;

rather, envisioning an effective path to a successful future

requires that a leader is deeply cognizant of her context

without being trapped by such a context.[[3]](#endnote-3)

One of the most revolutionary approaches

to organization development

that has emerged in the past decades: appreciative inquiry

posits “dreaming” as the first stage

in a community’s development forward.

Beyond its contributions to business ventures

there is also a long tradition

for employing our imagination, the power to envision

even holy daydreaming

as a cherished way to come closer to God.

One of the most celebrated saints

to deploy his formidable imagination to shape his life

and that of his religious community and the Church

was Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

Ignatius’ own writings document

the importance of what one Ignatian expert actually calls

religious “daydreams.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Like one of his heroes, St. Francis of Assisi

early on in his life, Ignatius dreamed of chivalry

and romantic adventures.

During his long convalescence

After being seriously wounded in battle

his dreaming continued as he imagined himself

a new St. Francis

another transformed knight in Christ.

As the psychologist J. Marshal Jenkins notes[[5]](#endnote-5)

Ignatius’ dreams led him to develop

a process of discernment

that eventually blossomed into his famous

spiritual exercises

in which imagination is a key strategy

for making the spiritual journey.

While the vision of John in the book of Revelation

might not be a great source of inspiration to us

with its images of lambs and dragons

beasts and women clothed with the Sun

four horsemen and the chorus of 144,000

intended to shore up the faith and fervor

of churches under serious persecution

it does remind us, that the origin of this book,

the origin of our faith

is grounded in the very vision of Jesus Christ.

Now you might be saying to yourself,

sure Jesus was a mystic

and he did appear in the phantasm

we call the transfiguration

and then there are all of those appearances

to his disciples after the resurrection

but we might have some difficult putting our finger

any specific Jesus visions

probably because they are no longer recalled

as shimmering oracles of a new world

like the dramatic language of the Book of Revelation

probably because

they have become so common place to us.

Recall that when he was confronted with the adulterous woman

his vision was not of sin but forgiveness;

when he spied the diminutive Zacchaeus up a tree

his daydreaming was not out outcast but new generosity;

and when he came across peasant fishermen on a beach

his imagination did not behold bumpkins but disciples.

It is true that the vision of John

has given us a whole book of revelations

but the vision of Jesus

has given us the whole of the New Testament,

the whole of Christianity

rooted in his radical new vision of a holy kingdom

in which there are no outcasts or lepers or slaves

but only friends, disciples, beloved.

In a unique and mysterious way

The gospels and other books of the New testament

map what could rightly be called Jesus’ vision quest:

his mission to bring about a truly peaceable kingdom.

Happily for us today,

our Gospel passage succinctly summarizes the whole

of the Jesus vision,

of the very daydreaming of God

of the most sacred hope of the divine imagination:

That we might love one another

And so reveal us as true disciples.

In a favorite rabbinic story, a rabbi asked his students how they could tell when the night had ended and the day was begun. "Could it be," asked one "when you can see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?" "No," said the rabbi. "Is it," asked another, "When you can look at a distant tree and tell whether it is an olive or a fig?" "No," said the rabbi. "Is it," asked a third, "when you can gaze into a cup and tell whether the liquid is water or wine?" "No," said the rabbi." Then tell us, they demanded, "Tell us when you know that the night has ended and the day is on its way." "It is," said the rabbi, "when you can look into the face of any woman or man and see that they are your sister or brother, because if you cannot do this then it is still night no matter what the time.

Living a life of faith requires an imagination

a vision of what could be in God:

the possibility of treating all people with equal dignity

the possibility of generosity rather than greed

the possibility of peace rather than war

the possibility of John’s vision in today’s second reading

of a new heaven and a new earth.

May this eucharist fortify us with these mystical gifts

that we might see and enact

this revolutionary vision of Christ,

whom we call Lord and God, forever.

1. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-interpretation-of-dreams-by-sigmund-freud-2795855> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2021/02/24/is-a-vision-statement-important/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://hbr.org/2007/10/the-importance-of-vision> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/pray-with-your-imagination/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.jmarshalljenkins.com/2018/04/18/ignatius-dreams-young-discernment/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)