

We have been reading apocalyptic readings from the scriptures every Sunday, and will continue to do so into the beginning of Advent. The Church does this annually, to help us *to face in the right direction, which is to heaven.*

It is easy for us to be distracted – holiday preparations, shopping, family gatherings, holiday parties. There probably will not be nearly as much (any?) of this for many folks this year. The pandemic has altered many things, even Thanksgiving and Christmas!

But from a faith perspective, dealing with apocalyptic realities should come naturally to us. We know how the story ends. We know who directs it, no matter how it may appear to us at any given moment. And we also know that previous apocalyptic experiences in our lives have led us to discover all kinds of things we didn't know about ourselves – and others. We know that marriages, families, communities, nations often come together and discover their true strength when some apocalypse – some new revelation of the fault lines in our lives – has occurred. Hospital chaplains see this all the time. For some reason we human beings seem to learn best how to love when we're a bit broken, when our plans fall apart, when our myths of self-sufficiency and goodness and safety are shattered. Apocalypse is meant to bring us to our senses, even our knees, allowing us a sobering, and usually painful, glimpse of what is possible in the new life we build from the ashes of the old. (Help here from Kathleen Norris, *AMAZING GRACE: A VOCABULARY OF FAITH*, p. 31)

Diane E. Meier is the director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care in New York City's Mount Sinai Medical Center. She offers some advice to family members who can't be physically present with their loved ones dying of coronavirus, who can only communicate with them by telephone. Instead of family around them, the dying patients get a video conversation or a telephone placed by their ear.

Dr. Meier suggests families use these to communicate 5 thoughts, even if they cannot be present.

\*\*\*Thank you

\*\*\*I forgive you

\*\*\*Please forgive me

\*\*\*I love you

\*\*\*Goodbye.

"Very few families aren't in tears by the end of that list," she said. (adapted from John Leland, "at 89, She Fears Dying Alone More Than the Coronavirus Itself," *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, April 7, 2020)

But we do not need to wait until a person is dying to say these things! (Except goodbye!) If we are fortunate enough to be gathering in person for Thanksgiving or Christmas this year, we can do this at the table, and if not, we can skype/zoom/facetime family members and friends we cannot gather with and say them.

Just because life is not being lived in our 'normal' way (whatever that means to anyone!) does not mean that we need to forego substantive communication and deepening bonds of family and friendship.

And we can always be grateful! If for no more than the fact that we are alive, (alone?), still realizing the many blessings that life has given to us, including family we are missing during holiday times. Amen.

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