

**SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
**Lake Worth, Florida**

Proper 28C (November 13, 2010) *EVENING EUCHARIST BEFORE INTEGRITY- PALM BEACH* Canon Richard T. Nolan

**COPING WITH GRIM NEWS AS CHILDREN OF GOD**

Bob and I are delighted to worship with you again! It was almost two years ago that I fully retired from ordained ministry and in this pulpit offered what was supposed to be my final sermon. Nearly one year ago we moved to a “continuing care retirement community” in Pompano Beach, a very appropriate change. However, St. Andrew’s remains our parish.

*Apocalyptic Views and Movements*

During recent months we’ve been watching many television documentaries about possible ways the world might end or at least suffer global devastation. Fanciful predictions based on some Mayan beliefs give us until December, 2012. Others include an array of forecasts including social unrest, violence, population explosion, and governmental collapses throughout the world. Among some scientists, the possibilities of an asteroid collision, the results of persistent global warming, and the inevitability of the sun consuming our planet are very real.

End-time views and movements focus on ambiguous revelations about a sudden, dramatic, and cataclysmic intervention of God in history that include God’s judgment of all; the salvation of the faithful; and the eventual rule of God. A product of the Judeo-Christian tradition, such “apocalyptic” literature, as it’s called, characteristically takes narrative form, employs cryptic language, expresses a pessimistic view of the present, and treats final events as imminent.

*The Gospel Selection As Apocalyptic*

The Gospel passage read in this Service is very much apocalyptic, arising during times of suffering and persecution. In it we heard of Jesus’ concern for the decisive events coming upon Jerusalem and that God will eventually establish a new social order. In the meantime, it teaches that Christ’s faithful disciples must be prepared to suffer under both civil and religious authorities, while remaining confident of God’s ultimate victory. Even while subject to persecutions, they are not to hide from conflict, or tread water, but grasp the situation as an opportunity for witnessing to the emancipating Good News of Christ. The faithful are called to cope and persevere, in harmony with Christ’s word and wisdom, and to witness to God’s promise of eventual justice and peace. The Gospel warns that the specific time of the completion of the world’s present order and the establishment of God’s Kingdom is uncertain. The heart of this apocalyptic message is not a timetable for the End of the world; instead, it is a summons to work for the fulfillment of peace at every personal and societal level and to draw upon spiritual resources to cope with inevitable adversity and distress.

*Some Current Distortions and Persecutions*

In October, my new bishop, Ian Douglas of Connecticut, said during his first address to Diocesan Convention: “... in our country, it seems that everywhere we look we are increasingly alienated from each other in ever more distorted human and political relationships. Our political system, once the great democratic hope of many, is strained almost to the point of breaking in this election season. Tea Party members, Democrats, and Republicans are all pointing the finger at each other blaming one other for the harsh economic and political times in which we live. And there is no lack of incivility and even hate in our society today as we scapegoat the ‘other,’ the marginalized, the one who is different, in an attempt to alleviate our fears, our insecurities, and our sense of loss. Persecution of migrants and immigrants who cross our nation’s border looking for work and a better life, verbal and even physical attacks on people of

the Islamic faith with accusations that they are terrorists, are all symptoms of the alienation in our country today. God's mission of restoration and reconciliation in our country is needed now more than ever."

This congregation is well aware of all sorts of societal persecutions. Despite significant progress for LGBT people, we remain marginalized in some areas of the Law and by unspoken and spoken negative attitudes harbored both by the general citizenry and a majority of religious believers. Many issues and negative comments related to us permeated the recent election cycle and have been all too obvious to us throughout our lives.

### *Some Progress We Have Experienced*

Without being Pollyanna, though, I must testify to *some progress* that Bob and I have experienced. Now both 73, we are a pre-Stonewall couple who had the good luck to begin our life together in 1955 as quite closeted, Trinity College (Hartford) freshmen, a time when we did not even know the word "gay." In a basic psychology course we took together the professor and textbook informed us that all homosexual people were mentally ill; we sort of accepted that, but took the attitude that we wanted to be who we were together despite anyone's labels. We felt so right about our feelings for each other that we suspected that along with psychologists of the day, both Church and State were simply terribly mistaken on this topic. Without examples to follow, we were able to design a life right for us as we went along; so that our career ambitions had a chance of success we readily employed reasonable accommodations and considerable deception.

Now fast forward to this time! Mainstream psychology has radically altered its understandings of human sexuality in all its diversity. A year ago while we were in Connecticut for our 50<sup>th</sup> class reunion, we were the first legal, same-sex couple married in Trinity College's Chapel. Our marriage was reported in accord with existing practices of the *New York Times*. Retirement life is such that we are *now totally* open and public in both Church and State. We currently live in a diverse and inclusive community of 1000 elders that include several LGBT couples and singles; as far as we know, such relationships are a non-issue. To us, all of these, and other, changes reflect rather remarkable progress that we could never have imagined as college undergraduates.

### *Current Deficits and Threats To LGBT Progress*

Nevertheless, our marriage is not recognized in Florida; we have to settle for somewhat useful domestic partnership registrations at only the County level. Residents of Florida, we have no spousal benefits connected with our pensions and Social Security – which is the case in most states. Regrettably, youngsters are still committing suicide over sexual orientation and like issues; LGBT people are still condemned by many stagnant religious bodies at local and international levels. Our largely dysfunctional and seemingly "bought" Congress may be sweeping us aside again; repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is again in jeopardy. Fortunately, potentially far-reaching court cases were filed in Massachusetts on Tuesday to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act. Regardless of new laws, however, a large portion of the citizenry appears to be willfully ignorant about *so much* solid information, including science-based matters about human diversity (and the wondrous universe in which we live). Were it not for court decisions related to many human relationships, we would still be in a 1955 climate. Yet, bolstered by the recent elections, those on the far right are poised to persist in their efforts to turn back the clock, and we cannot yet take for granted that the gains of recent decades will hold. *That* could happen, if many among the general public have their way; as a retired college professor, I would propose that more than ever, cultivated ignorance has become a civic virtue among significant portions of the citizenry.

These opening weeks of November have provided the two of us with an unusual calendar. Last Saturday Bob and I attended a Fort Lauderdale *Lambda Legal* reception of close to a hundred members for an updating. Just yesterday we attended a reception to support the *ACLU's* Campaign to End Florida's Adoption Ban and learned of new right-wing initiatives to undo recent progress. Tomorrow another Fort Lauderdale event will find us at *Equality Florida's* gathering to honor Martin Gill with its Voice For Equality Award; Martin's fight to adopt his children led the courts to strike down Florida's notorious ban on gay and lesbian adoption – which, though, may face further challenges. There can be no slowdown in the pursuit of LGBT justice.

*Self-Care Essential To A Genuine and Full Life*

To many of us, apocalyptic warnings feel very real. Adding to our own experiences, televised news accents everything from the alarming physical condition of planet Earth to its multitude of polarized, often hysterically ignorant inhabitants. This input can get to any of us emotionally – beckoning us toward despair! Some well-meaning activists feel obligated to take on one cause after another, thereby inviting Samaritan burnout. Although each of us is called to witness to social justice issues however our circumstances permit, I would like to conclude by focusing on one very important matter – *self-care*. Remember Christ's "love your neighbor *as yourself*"?

I am convinced that the only way to fend off personal despair and chronic cynicism, even hopelessness and embitterment, is to cultivate an internal *center* which will provide both *perspective* and personal *strength to cope* with it all. I am persuaded that the only way we can perceive positively the slow progress that *has* occurred, you and I need a solid, reliable, life-giving, balanced, and upbeat psyche with which we deal effectively with the often harmful and depressing apocalyptic-type input. In this connection, we must build individual boundaries with appropriate buffers between our innermost selves and external disarray.

In other words, you and I need to focus on a sense of *self*, an inner identity, an anchor, which can reliably ground and sustain us - and defend us from plunging into hardness of heart, emotional emptiness, or even modes of self-destruction. Our largely twisted global cultures do not, and cannot, supply this sacred center for anyone. We endure impending catastrophes and are sustained amidst turmoil - we maintain room for seeing the good amidst the impending bad -, *only* when we have a dependable, energized, *untouchable* sense of self.

Armed with the inner strength of our shared baptism, *that each of us is a named, valuable, unique child of God*, you and I *can* cope, and press on - while incorporating sufficient time to slow down, and when at all possible, to lighten up, and indeed to laugh! With even more sophisticated strategies to overcome willful ignorance and injustice, we can try to create oases of love and understanding as we are able. Both individually and collectively, we have an opportunity for witnessing to the healing, Good News of Christ.

As worthy and graced "children of God," you and I are called to endure while we seek fairness in Church and State. Therefore, amidst current grim news and threats to creeping progress, *focus, know, and accept with your heart and mind who you truly are ----- and in the best and worst of times, by your spiritual endurance, you will win a genuinely fulfilled life!*

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**LUKE 21:5-19**

**When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."**

**They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them.**

**" When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.**

**" But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."**