Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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April 28, 2022

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“Wait for the LORD with courage; be strong of heart and wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:13-14).

Acts 5:34-42; Jn 6:1-15

Predictions about the future often turn out badly. We think we can assess the trajectory of an investment, promised performance by an athlete, or the future of a movement. Look to the day’s news: Whether it is the influence of a social platform on the midterm elections, or the future of football teams based on draft picks, we find that we cannot predict the future. What we seek to control is directed by the sudden appearance of “black swans,” the anomalies that change the course of events by surprise that then become “inevitable” in hindsight.

The respected Pharisee Gamaliel in today's first reading was wise by being cautious, telling his colleagues in the Sanhedrin to let the Christians decide their own fate as either a false movement or one blessed by God. To oppose them might put their critics against God, "kicking against the goad," a metaphor about a team of oxen prodded in their harnesses. Outcomes are ultimately God's business.

In the fourteenth century, today's commemorated Saint Catherine of Siena urged the pope, whom she famously called her "sweet babbo" (father). to return to Rome from Avignon, which led to a crisis in which three figures vied for the papacy. She died in the midst of this calamity for the church, only to emerge after her death as one of its greatest protectors.

In today's Gospel, after Jesus miraculously fed the crowds, they tried to make him their king. He retreated into the mountains, already knowing his path of relinquishing victory to embrace humble surrender as Isaiah's "suffering messiah." The disciples were shocked by Jesus' failure to take power in the final weeks of his life. Instead of using his popularity to negotiate with the Jewish establishment, he entered Jerusalem mocking the Romans with his theatrical ride into the city on a donkey, and then attacked corruption in the Temple. Within the week, he was crucified and his movement temporarily dispersed.

Time would show that Jesus' strange path to real power was in his death on the cross and his resurrection, while other great figures of his day disappeared into the dust of death. This is one of the great lessons of history, that love, truth and goodness do reign not just over the hearts of humanity but also over the deepest trends hidden within major human change. How change happens is a mystery, but it falls along the same path that history takes by slowly bending toward justice.

It takes a lifetime of faith and dedication to see the hand of God in events, but it proves that hope is more than optimism and that the future is not revealed in computer algorithms or social media but from the visions of prophets who wait and trust in God's mercy and design.

The big game is won by a substitute quarterback going long and deep in overtime. A teen from Sweden calls out the choices we must make to save our planet. The foolish wisdom of a placeholder pope named John 60 years ago was passed forward to an Argentinian surprise named Francis, who is determined to advance the vision of a synodal church born at Vatican II.

We show we believe in the resurrection every time we cross the threshold of hope into an unimagined future only God can provide.

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