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)