

Faith in the Existential Moment

The collect for this morning begins with *"Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility..."* I think that it is rather descriptive of the predicament in which we often find ourselves in this advent or any season. It describes us as living in the existential moment between the long past and the not yet future. It is often a moment of pain, anxiety and fear because we experience the heat of the now—a woman in her last moments before child birth, a student just as he or she is about to take an exam, a defendant who is just about to go before the prosecutor and judge, and a family member who has had bad experiences at family gatherings during Thanksgiving or Christmas gatherings. What do you do? How do you face these moments?

Advent I this year places before us such a situation. You and I may dread listening to the appointed lessons because on the surface there seems to be little good news or comfort. Jeremiah points us toward a future time beyond the childbirth, exam, trial and feared family gatherings. Psalm 25 admonishes us to trust in the faithfulness of a loving and forgiving God. Paul in I Thessalonians was looking forward to another visit with the people of Thessalonika. But then the Gospel, thrusts us into the pain, fear and anxiety of signs of a catastrophic end, of time with some of the worst case scenarios—"signs in the sun, moon and stars; the shaking of the powers of heaven, people fainting because of the fear of what was coming. It asks us to take a lesson from the fig tree and tells us that these things must take place. It warns us to be on our guard and not to be weighed down with loose living and undue worry. If we concentrate on those parts of the scriptures, we may miss hearing any good news or getting anything that can help us in our anxious moments. What do we do? How can we stand in those moments?

First of all, Psalm 25 tells us to begin with faith in a faithful God. *"To you O Lord, I lift up my soul, my God I put my trust in you."* Please note that the collect this morning begins with the prayer asking for the grace "to cast away the works of darkness." This happens before putting on the armor of light. Only faith in God can enable us to stand in the midst of darkness (of pain, anxiety and fear) and to believe that darkness can be cast off before light comes. Thus, we begin our stand with a strong and trusting faith in a faithful God.

Secondly, we can stand in the midst of our pain, anxiety and fear when we remember what God has done for us personally in the past and especially what he had done for us in his Son Jesus Christ. Jeremiah knew of God's goodness to his people in the past and believed that Israel and Judah would be saved, reunited and enabled to live in safety. Paul had a good experience with the people of Thessalonika and believed that he would return to strengthen their faith. And, in the midst of all of the foreboding warnings about the end-time, Jesus encouraged his disciples with the fact that those signs would indicate that redemption of the faithful was near. His words would not pass away. And with vigilance and prayer, his people would be strengthened to escape all those things and to stand before the Son of Man at the end of time.

Third and finally, we can be comforted in the face of our personal and collective pain, anxiety and fear because having faith in a faithful God, we stand between the two pillars of the Incarnation of the past and the hopeful consummation of God's love and promised salvation in the future. Therefore in the face of possible pain, anxiety and fear, I commend to you the words of Donnie McClurkin.

You Just Stand

by Donnie McClurkin

Edited and Adjusted Version: (Google Donnie McClurkin for the song and complete lyrics).

What do you do
When you've done all you can
And it seems like it's never enough?
And what do you say
When your friends turn away,
And you're all alone?
Tell me, what do you give
When you've given your all,
And it seems like
You can't make it through?

Well you just stand,
When there's nothing left to do.
You just stand,
Watch the Lord see you through.
Yes, after you done all you can,
You just stand!

Be not entangled in that bondage again,
You just stand, and endure.
God has a purpose.
Yes, God has a plan.

Don't you dare give up (You Just Stand)
Through the storm (Stand), Stand through the rain (Stand)
Through the hurt (Stand), jet through the pain (You just stand).
Don't you bow (stand), and don't bend (Stand)
Don't give up (Stand) , no, don't give in (You just stand).
Hold on, (Stand) just be strong (Stand)
God will step in (Stand), and it won't be long (You just stand).

After you gone through the hurt,
After you gone through the pain,
After you gone through the storm,
After you gone through the rain,
After you have Prayed and cried,

After you done all you can,

You just stand!

I can not attest to Donnie McClurkin's faith but I believe that it is that faith that inspires him to share those lyrics with us.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us the grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.