

Homily – Nov. 24, 2020

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We celebrate our God who is with us in all difficult times. Fittingly today, we celebrate St. Andrew Dung-lac and 117 companions, including western missionaries, who were martyred in Vietnam in the 1700s and 1800s. Popes beatified them in several groups representing between 130,000-300,000 souls tortured to death in a very sadistic and gruesome fashion in the 1700s, 1800s. Pope John Paul II canonized them in 1988.

“The Gospel contains basically two important admonitions for by Jesus for his disciples. First, he reminds his disciples that the glorious handiwork of human beings, too, will pass. Some of that will involve on-coming destruction—so bad that scattered stones and bricks will indicate utter disaster. Secondly, the disciples must be careful not to get carried away with fake news sparked by horrible events in this earth. People will then say that the end of the earth is very near.

We surely have heard such interpretations about this 2020 pandemic—either that God is now punishing us and/or that the end of the world must be right around the corner. Jesus encourages his followers by saying, “Do not be terrified.” Horrible things are going to happen. The list of such disasters contains a mixture of human-doing (wars, famines, plagues) and many are natural disasters (powerful earthquakes and awesome [scarey] sights and signs in the sky.

How did Jesus himself remain strong and hopeful in the face oppression and his own on-coming crucifixion? He prayed, “Not my will, but your will be done [O God].” He trusted that whatever the will of God was, it was for some good—eventually. What most likely helped Jesus’ disciples and can help us now, so as not to feel terrified when horrible things happen? It comes down to believing Jesus’ promise that he remains with us until the end of time. It comes down to believing that at the core of each human being lies the image of God. We are temples of God’s Spirit of love.

We have seen over and over again that wildfires, tornadoes, floods often bring the best out of many people who come to the aid of total strangers. In the amid WWII some Christians other good-hearted people rescued many Jews. Today, in

various scenes of conflict and war, there are those courageous people who heroically help and protect one another transcending different faiths and tribes. Yes, as the song says, [sing along] “Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, Deus ibi est.” Yes, where there’s charity and love, there is God—even in the middle of the worst disasters, plagues and wars. The kingdom of God is still on the way. We can remain hopeful.