

Your endurance will win you your lives

Spare a thought for the people of Tacloban Island in the Philippines this weekend as they listen to the Gospel and hear the words of Jesus saying *not a single stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed*. What feelings must be swirling about in their minds as they contemplate the reality of a storm of apocalyptic proportions that has swept away so many lives and left such devastation in its wake? What hope is left? What future remains; certainly not an easy one. That this gospel rings in our ears this week reminds us all of the fragility of our own lives; there but for the grace of God...

The sweeping away of the Temple by the Romans in AD70 when they devastated Jerusalem was an act of great trauma for the Jews. Their lives would never be the same again. The infrastructure of their religion and the whole format of their worship were essentially annihilated by Titus and his troops. But the destruction of the Temple also had its impact on the early Christians too, to the extent that there are echoes of the event heard clearly in the gospel. Jesus tells the disciples to watch out for such destructive events in their lives, but not necessarily as portents of the coming of the kingdom since he tells the disciples *the kingdom is already among you*. In other words, he is telling us that the living out of good and decent lives in the midst of trauma and shock, of death and destruction is the mark of the presence of the kingdom. Jesus himself, through his ministry and teaching inaugurates the kingdom and will face the rejection of his own people to the ultimate cost of his own life. However the meaning of his death is evoked in the gospel when as he dies the Temple veil is torn. The symbolism of this moment, of his death and resurrection, is thus rendered as revelatory for his followers. He is the new temple in and through whom our pathway to God is made apparent. Our ultimate hope is to experience the fullness of the kingdom through our endurance which Jesus says will win us this treasure.

So our hearts and prayers go out to the people of Tacloban and their fellow countrymen and women who are having to contend with such devastation, the like of which very few of us will ever have to experience. Their lives have now been totally changed as they endure so much hardship and upheaval. It is at moments like this that we feel somewhat useless as images of the bereaved and the bereft come into our living rooms and we ask what can we do, how can we help? Of course the practical hands on assistance that is so badly needed has to be provided by those properly trained in emergency and disaster recovery, but let us not discount the value of our prayer which will have its own effect. Keeping these shattered people at the forefront of our thoughts and prayers is paramount.

The DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee) has launched an appeal to raise \$190 million in aid for the people affected by the typhoon. It sounds an enormous amount and it is. As it was being announced I was struck by two other pieces of news that hit the headlines at the same time. Two pictures, one by Francis Bacon and the other by Andy Warhol were sold at auction for a combined total of \$245 million. This weekend our parish will through your generosity and love, make its contribution to the appeal. It probably won't make the news, but like our prayers it will have its effect and it will be our opportunity to bear witness.