

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Walt Disney opened his first amusement park, Disney Land in Anaheim, California, in July, 1957, the property was divided into six venues, or areas. The park has since expanded and changed greatly, but those first six areas were: Main St., U. S. A.; Adventureland; Fantasyland; Frontierland; Holidayland; and Tomorrowland.

Walk Disney’s personal favorite among the six areas may well have been “Tomorrowland,” for he was personally intrigued by, and extremely interested in, the future and in travel into space.

I mention this because the idea of “tomorrow” – the future, the time that has not yet arrived – actually plays a strong role in biblical faith. “Tomorrow” is the stuff of prophecy. “The days are coming when ...” proclaimed the prophets.

Such prophecies were often uttered during dark and dismal days in Israel’s history when not only the present but also the future looked bleak. But “tomorrow” was how the prophets kept Israel’s faith alive.

For example, when the people had been marched away to Babylon to live in exile from their homeland, the prophet Jeremiah wrote to them to report these words of God:

“Assuredly, the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon; her whole land shall be put to shame, and all her slain shall fall in her midst. ... Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel You survivors of the sword, go, do not linger! Remember the Lord in a distant land, and let Jerusalem come into your mind (Jeremiah 51:47, 49-50).

That the present is never the end of the story is a persistent Biblical theme. The Christian viewpoint can be stated something like this: When you embrace the way of Christ, you enter the kingdom of God, which is already here in some ways, but you also inherit the hope of the kingdom to come, where God’s love and power are fully present, where all wrongs are righted and where there is neither sorrow nor suffering anymore.

Our Second Reading today is typical of such biblical thought. The day is coming no when there will be no more mourning or crying or pain.

While some see this as referring to heaven, it is also the goal of human history – that as long as the world is less than it should be, Christians have the task of working toward making this life as much like the promised kingdom as is possible.

But where the “tomorrow factor” comes most into Christian teaching is when we are personally facing sorrow or pain that seems insolvable. “Don’t lose hope,” we say. “There is a better world coming.”

In the end, nothing can separate us from the love of God.” Tomorrow – some distant tomorrow – you will see your loved one again. Tomorrow there will be war no more. Tomorrow all violence will cease and everyone will live peaceably with his or her neighbor. This will all happen tomorrow.

While the tomorrow factor is helpful to many, it is also what turns some people off to the Christian faith. They listen to that and say, “Why Christianity is just like all the other philosophies: based on a someday hope, instead of immediate plans and solutions.”

In other words, they see Christianity as primarily wishful thinking. Perhaps you’ve felt that way yourself sometimes. Well, there is a sense in which critics of the Christian faith are absolutely right. Christianity does indeed have a wishful-thinking element.

Where we differ with our critics, however, is on the substance of what our wishful thinking can accomplish. Christian author Frederick Buechner has written, “Sometimes wishing is the wings the truth comes true on. Sometimes the truth is what sets us wishing for it.”

You see, one thing wishful thinking means is that we have a dream. We have a dream of a world of peace and justice ... a world where suffering is gone. Dreams and goals are a strong part of what motivate us to try to change things, to make things better, to do good, to alleviate agony.

Surely that applies in the areas of human hurts and hopes. The Bible helps us to do some wishful thinking about how things should be, so that we can be motivated to do what we can to make them be that way – and to do so not to earn God’s favor, but in response to God’s grace and mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ.

What comes to my mind as I think about this is the “I Have a Dream” speech spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr., on the Mall in Washington, D. C., in August, 1963. Some have called that speech “the most famous public address of 20th century America.”

And if it indeed was that, I believe it was because it was filled with the tomorrow factor and with wishful thinking. Rev. Dr. King said, “Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.”

Dr. King said his dream was that our nation would rise up and “live out the true meaning of its creed ... that all ... are created equal.” He said his dream was that his children “will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” And, yes, Dr. King’s speech was laced with biblical images and analogies.

Today, most people, regardless of race, have acknowledged that some progress has been made toward that dream. We still have a long way to go, but before we could get anywhere, there had to be the hope, the wishful thinking.

So, yes, the Christian faith definitely has a “tomorrow factor.” The Christian faith is laced with vision and expectation. Christianity looks into the future and says, “A day is surely coming when ...” Wishful thinking is not wasted thinking. Wishful thinking means we believe in a future.

That’s important to grasp when we remember that today is All Saints Day. It’s a time to honor all those who through the centuries who have lived and died in Christ. The tomorrow factor reminds us that the saints of old and our loved ones are not gone forever. The faith in which they died will someday bring them into that eternal kingdom that has been promised to all who follow Jesus.

To live our lives in that same kind of expectation, we need the tomorrow factor. The hopeful message of God’s Word guides us as Christians to have a sense of how to get to tomorrow, to a better tomorrow.

This comes from the confidence we have in the One who holds the future, and in the belief that wishful thinking is not wasted thinking, but is a rehearsal for how it is going to be when God’s kingdom becomes a full reality at the end of time. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

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