

PRAY God of wisdom, you sustain the world in which we live. You are with us in every breath and heartbeat, every beginning and ending. Help us choose wisely. Amen.

by Angela V. Mitchell

“Matt will be here soon. We have to think of something to do.” My friend Steph sprawled on my bed with her head against the wall.

It was Friday night, our first year of college. My phone rang. That’s when I started drifting into dangerous circumstances without making responsible choices.

“Jessie, come and visit tonight.” It was my brother, Eric, already a sophomore in college. We usually talk once or twice a week. “Bring some friends along,” he added.

“Do you want to go to see my brother?” I asked Steph. “It’s 75 miles to get there.”

She nodded and said, “I can drive.”

Amy, who lives next to us, wanted to go, even though she had to work the next morning.

SPiRIT

The four of us didn’t even get to my brother’s dorm until almost midnight, circumstance one. We played Outburst until almost 4:00 a.m. We decided to crash on the couches and drive back in the morning.

“We’ve got to leave by 7:30,” Amy said. “I can’t miss work.”

Circumstance two.

“I’m setting my brother’s alarm for 7:15,” I said. The next thing I remember is the alarm beeping. When I woke up, I saw Stephanie and Amy sitting on Eric’s old couch laughing. “We didn’t exactly get any sleep,” Steph said when she saw me staring at her. Circumstance three.

“Wait until I get to work,” Amy said. She pulled her eyelids open with her fingers. “I can just see myself.” She flashed a fake smile, “Hi, I’m Amy and I’m your server.”

“Steph,” I asked, “do you want me to drive?”

“Not my new car. I’ll stop for caffeine.”

We took off. Stephanie pulled into a gas station to get a Mountain Dew. Matt was already asleep in the passenger seat.

“Steph looks tired,” Amy said.

“I’ll keep talking to her if you want to sleep,” I said.

Amy shut her eyes. Steph came out, put her billfold in the glove compartment, and touched a prayer cross she had stuck on the visor. It made me smile. Everyone had seatbelts on except me. I sat forward, so I could talk to Steph. It started snowing lightly after about a half hour. Nothing is as hypnotizing as snow swirling at the windshield. Circumstance four.

Choices

CIRCUMSTANCES



“Why don’t you pull over at the next exit. I’ll drive the rest of the way,” I offered.

“We’re almost there,” Steph said.

I turned around to look for a sign or landmark to figure out exactly where we were. When I turned back to the road ahead, Stephanie was coming up fast on a car driving much slower than us. “Steph, do you see that car?”

She jerked awake and braked but the car had too much momentum. We hit a patch of ice and skidded to the right. I looked back. There were no cars in the three lanes to our right. Then the right front of our car hit the hard packed snow piled on the side of the road. It flipped. It flipped again. I remember saying to myself, “Don’t tense up, or you’ll really get hurt.”

The car stopped. I heard silence for one long moment before Stephanie started screaming. Matt got out and went around to the driver’s side to help Steph.

Amy found her cell phone. “I’m calling 911,” she said.

I went to check on Stephanie with Matt. Matt said his knee hurt a little.

“Stephanie? Are you all right?” I questioned.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“About 10 miles from school,” Matt replied. “We’re on the interstate.”

Steph looked confused. “What happened? Why are we here?” she kept asking between sobs.

“She’s in shock,” I said. “Steph, can you walk?”

Steph nodded and we took a few steps. Amy joined us and immediately screamed, “Jessie, o-my-gosh! There’s blood running out of your ear!”

I found a piece of glass that had made a small cut. I wiped the blood away. The EMTs arrived. Matt talked to them.

“Steph should be checked out,” Matt explained.

“Is anyone else hurt?” the EMT asked. “We’ll check each of you out.”

The rest of us were all right. Stephanie was crying. “I have to call my mom.”

“We will call her for you,” the EMT assured her. “Right now we are going to take you to the emergency room. One of your friends can go with you.”

Steph grabbed my hand, so I went with her.

I climbed in the ambulance with Steph. I will never forget how tightly she held on.

“What’s my dad going to say?” Steph said as the EMT examined her in the ambulance and the siren sounded overhead. “He is going to hate me. I am so sorry.”

“He’s going to be happy we’re all alive,” I said.

“I’m sorry. Please don’t hate me, Jess. I’m so sorry.”

“Steph! I don’t hate you, you’re my friend. Don’t worry. No one is going to be mad at you.”



Steph had a fractured clavicle and missed a few days of school. Amy never made it to work. I saw the wrecked car that afternoon with Matt and Steph’s dad. We were lucky.

Four days later Steph came back to school and Matt came over.

“It’s weird, Jess, how we came out of the accident so well,” Steph said. “You know I rubbed my prayer cross on the visor before we started. My grandma gave it to me when I started driving.”

“Yeah,” I said.

“I seriously believe God was with us.”

“I seriously do, too, but not because of the visor cross.”

“That’s superstitious,” Matt added. “What if you hadn’t rubbed it, or what if we’d been killed? Would that mean God wasn’t with us? Or would it have been your fault that we were killed because you didn’t rub the cross?”

“I’m serious,” Steph repeated.

“You rubbed the cross, but you got hurt,” I said. “I didn’t rub the



SUNDAY GOSPEL

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus says, "Trust me."

NARRATOR: Some were speaking of how the temple was adorned with precious stones and votive offerings.

JESUS 1: The temple you are talking about—the day will come when not one stone will be left on another; it will all be destroyed.

DISCIPLES: When will this occur, Teacher? And what will be the sign it is going to happen?

JESUS 2: Take care not to be misled. Many will come in my name saying, "I am he" and "The time is at hand." Do not follow them. Neither must you be perturbed when you hear of wars and insurrections. These things are bound to happen first, but the end does not follow immediately.

JESUS 3: Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, plagues, and

famines in various places and in the sky fearful omens and great signs. But before any of this, they will persecute you, summoning you to synagogues and prisons, bringing you to trial before kings and governors, all because of my name. You will be brought to give witness on account of me.

JESUS 4: I bid you resolve not to worry about your defense beforehand, for I will give you words and a wisdom which none of your adversaries can take exception to or contradict. You will be delivered up even by your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and some of you will be put to death. All will hate you because of me, yet not a hair of your head will be harmed. By patient endurance you will save your lives.

Luke 21.5-19

cross and didn't have a seat belt, so I should have gotten hurt, but I didn't. What if you had chosen to let me drive? Or, what if it hadn't started to snow?"

"It's not about the visor cross," Matt agreed.

"My dad says it's about being responsible enough to be in college," I said. "God would have been there if the accident was bad, too."

It just happened that the Thursday after the accident was Thanksgiving.



OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

What is apocalyptic? A message of hope

Sunday's gospel passage comes from an apocalyptic section of Luke's gospel. Apocalyptic is a literary form full of codes that express oppressed people's hope that good will triumph over evil, that a faithful God will rescue them from their enemies.

In apocalyptic writing the world is falling apart. The usually stable sun, moon, and stars fall from the sky; famines, plagues, and wars run rampant.

Apocalyptic works are like the spirituals that developed during slavery among African Americans; both put oppressed people's hopes into code. The song "Steal Away to Jesus" had two meanings. A slave owner heard slaves seeking comfort in Jesus as their Savior. A slave heard the coast was clear to escape.

Apocalyptic writers describe visions that predict when evil will end. For example, the prophet Daniel describes a vision of four beasts—a lion with eagle wings, a devouring bear, a leopard with four heads and bird wings, a beast with iron teeth and ten horns. These beasts symbolize the nations that conquered Israel. Then the prophet sees the Ancient One coming to destroy the fourth beast, and one like a human coming on clouds to rule with justice. Read Daniel 7.1-14.

The Romans, who ruled Palestine in Jesus' time, were the fifth empire to conquer the area. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Greeks all made Israel part of their empires during the 600 years before Jesus. Apocalyptic writing influenced how many people thought. Many early Christians expected the risen Jesus, who triumphed over death, to come again in glory soon and create a new earth and new heaven in which God ruled.

Christian apocalyptic writing urges all who worry the world is getting crazier with no end in sight to trust Jesus' teaching—be patient and faithful. This genre is like *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *Divergent*, or *Harry Potter* and their sequels, which create mythic battles between good and evil in imaginary worlds.

Such films in the science fiction genre affirm our human capacity for good and demonstrate the destructive power of the dark side. Apocalyptic affirms the enduring power of faith in Jesus, the messiah. Living his message will transform the world.

QUESTIONS 1 When have you experienced God's presence with you in danger? In success? 2 How is our relationship with God about more than touching a prayer cross? 3 Why shouldn't we fear the end of the world? 4 If no one cared about living justly, would you? Why? 5 How do you show you are a Christian?

Basics about the bible

The bible is a whole library, not a single book. It holds 72 books between its covers. Of these books, 45 contain holy writings about the people of Israel's experience of God—the **Old Testament**. The other 27 communicate Christians' faith in Jesus, who taught us to love one another and even our enemies, who was crucified and raised from the dead as the promise of our own resurrection. This is the New Testament.

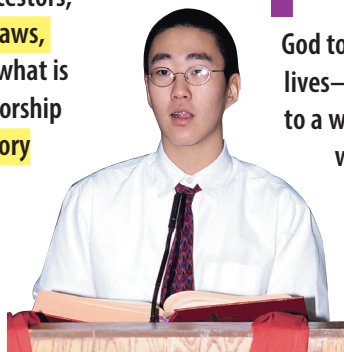
Genres or literary forms

A library or a bookstore puts books on its stacks or shelves by subjects—history, fiction, religion, poetry, cooking, travel. A movie rental store displays films in categories or genres—comedy, drama, action, mystery, musicals, horror, fantasy, documentary. In the same way even though the pages of the bible look alike, its books communicate in different genres.

A genre is a type or kind of literary work. We expect science fiction books to take us into futuristic, imaginary worlds. From poetry we expect carefully chosen words that create images and turns of expression that help us see and feel what the poet does. In a mystery we expect a plot with twists and turns to keep us guessing.

Old Testament literary forms

Because the bible contains writing from 2,000 to 4,000 years ago, its literary forms are not always familiar. The Old Testament includes **creation stories**, **epic sagas** about Israel's early ancestors, collections of ancient **laws**, **proverbs** for teaching what is wise, 150 poems for worship called **psalms**, the **history** of Israel's kings, the **sermons** of Israel's prophets.



Sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Catechism of the Catholic Church
#81, also 110-114

New Testament literary forms

The New Testament books come from the first century, most written from AD 50 to 100. These books include **letters** to early Christian communities from missionaries such as Paul, who founded them, or from other Church leaders. They include an **apocalypse**—an ancient form of literature somewhat like science fiction, and a genre Christians created called **gospel**.

A gospel is a **narrative**, but what makes this literary genre unique is that the gospel writers create these narratives by gathering together pieces of oral tradition. After Jesus' death and resurrection, his disciples preached his good news orally throughout the Mediterranean world for 40 years. As they did the work of handing on Jesus' words and deeds, the message took shape in many literary forms.

Some of Jesus' teachings took the form of short sayings, such as, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." "Love your enemies, do good to those who hurt you."

Many of Jesus' teachings take **parable** form. Parables compare the kingdom of God to experiences familiar in our lives—planting seeds, inviting guests to a wedding, leavening bread, paying workers their wages, finding a pearl so valuable a merchant spends everything to buy it. Parables invite us to see ourselves in

them. Who am I like in the parable of the prodigal son—like the merciful father, the wasteful younger son, or the jealous older son?

The gospels contain stories of Jesus' healing people or freeing them from evil spirits. These are **miracle stories** that often probe how faith heals.

The **passion account** that tells of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion may be the earliest part of the gospel narrative to take form. The gospels also contain accounts of the risen Jesus' appearances to his followers—his **Easter appearances**.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Nominate a person you know for the Nobel Prize for hope.
- 2 Who gives hope to children and young people who grow up poor in your city or area?
- 3 What evils do I see around me that I must resist?
- 4 What injustices do I see locally, globally?
- 5 How does knowing the bible is a library with books of different genres help you read the bible with more understanding?
- 6 Find parables, Luke 13.18-20. Find sayings, Luke 6.27-45. Find a miracle, Luke 7.1-10. Find the passion, Luke 22-23, the Easter appearances, Luke 24.
- 7 Visit Seeds of Peace on Facebook. Listen to Seeds' stories, for example, Yousef Bashir.