



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

WHAT DANIEL SAW IN THE NIGHT

By Sr. Christine Hilliard, CSJ

Today's First Reading

In a vision I, Daniel, saw during the night, the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea, from which emerged four immense beasts, each different from the others. The first was like a lion, but with eagle's wings. While I watched, the wings were plucked; it was raised from the ground to stand on two feet like a man, and given a human mind. The second was like a bear; it was raised up on one side, and among the teeth in its mouth were three tusks. It was given the order, "Up, devour much flesh." After this I looked and saw another beast, like a leopard; on its back were four wings like those of a bird, and it had four heads. To this beast dominion was given. After this, in the visions of the night I saw the fourth beast, different from all the others, terrifying, horrible, and of extraordinary strength; it had great iron teeth with which it devoured and crushed, and what was left it trampled with its feet. I was considering the ten horns it had, when suddenly another, a little horn, sprang out of their midst, and three of the previous horns were torn away to make room for it. This horn had eyes like a man, and a mouth that spoke arrogantly. As I watched, Thrones were set up and the Ancient One

took his throne. His clothing was snow bright, and the hair on his head as white as wool; His throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A surging stream of fire flowed out from where he sat; Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him, and myriads upon myriads attended him. The court was convened, and the books were opened. I watched, then, from the first of the arrogant words which the horn spoke, until the beast was slain and its body thrown into the fire to be burnt up. The other beasts, which also lost their dominion, were granted a prolongation of life for a time and a season. As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven. When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

DANIEL 7:2-14

Reflection

This chapter of Daniel envisions the fate of Jerusalem before its fall to Babylon in 587 BCE. Through a prophetic style of literature, the author writes about God announcing judgment and encouragement to the community as it meets a crisis in its political and religious existence. Typical of Daniel's culture, visions and symbolic actions dramatize the message. These may be strange images to other cultures, so understanding their meaning would invite investigation. For example: in the beginning of the passage, four beasts come from the churning waters surrounding the earth. This raging water signals negative chaos (which is an appropriate place for beasts). These beasts are described in frightening, exaggerated expressions of animals Daniel would have known, i.e., bears, eagles, lions, and leopards. They represent the perceived enemy kingdoms of Israel: Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. In his dream, Daniel witnesses the trial of these beasts in the heavenly court as each one is sentenced. Then in the same dream/vision, Daniel sees "one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven," which symbolizes the opposite image of the churning waters from whence the beasts/enemies came. This special human figure is a symbol for the holy people of God, Israel, who receive heavenly gifts of "dominion, glory, and kingship" over the nations, thus offering them security.



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For Pondering

- What symbols do you use to express realities in your life? (For example, what might a tree symbolize for you? Or the color orange? Or a spider? Or???)
 - Often we hear people using "similes" to describe the indescribable: "Her smile is like a sunrise." Complete this simile: "God is like ... for me." What does this simile symbol say about your perception of God?
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For Prayer

*Find some quiet time today.
Ask God what are God's symbols for you?
What do you hear God say? What is your response?*

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