

. . .two disciples were walking and talking about all that had happened. And it happened that as they were talking Jesus himself came up (Lk 24:14-15) You must be the only person who does not know the things that have been happening (Lk 24:18) . . . then they told the story of what had happened on the road . . . (Lk 24:35, NJB)

I did a Google search of the word “apocalypse.” The first response was a song titled “Apocalypse” by a group named “Cigarettes After Sex.” I don’t know their music, but the lyrics of the song describe the popular conception of “apocalypse”:

*You leapt from crumbling bridges  
Watching cityscapes turn to dust  
Filming helicopters crashing  
In the ocean from way above.*

This catchy refrain follows: *Your lips, my lips, Apocalypse.* Perhaps this is what is meant by “the kiss of death.”

This notion of apocalypse is galaxies away from how the word is used in the Bible. Literally it means *unveiling*, or *uncovering*, thus, more figuratively, *revelation*. If you think of Toto in the Wizard of Oz pulling back the curtain, revealing an old man roaring, you will get the picture.

On the road to Emmaus, two disciples, walk and talk and, *it happened* that Jesus drew near. Apocalypses cannot be induced by an effort of the will; we cannot conjure them up by magic or ritual practices or produce them by taking hallucinogenic drugs. They happen; they are gifts we can only receive.

The disciples are perplexed, bewildered, by their experience. They cannot make sense of the women’s message regarding an empty tomb. So, beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interprets all the scripture that referred to him.

The importance of scripture and its interpretation cannot be overstated. From the early days of the Christian movement, the cultivation of immediate consciousness of the divine presence took place within the exercise of reading, meditating, preaching, and teaching the biblical text.

*Night comes*, says Dale C. Allison, *when no one will read*. When no one reads, night comes. Like soil cultivated to receive seeds, consciousness is cultivated to perceive divine presence through reading sacred texts.

At dinner, Jesus, the guest, becomes the host. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples and their eyes are opened. As soon as they recognize Jesus, he vanishes from their sight.

An apocalypse generally lasts but a moment, yet seems to its subjects more important than anything else they experience. It is a revelation of reality.

Christianity entered human history not as a new creed or system of religious observance or wise way of walking through life, but as apocalypse: the sudden unveiling of a mystery hidden in God. A slave, legally crucified at the behest of all the religious and political authorities of his time, was raised up by God as Lord of the cosmos.

Author of *The Hobbit* and of *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien was in Saints Gregory & Augustine Church on Woodstock Road in Oxford, England. During the Eucharist, Tolkien experienced a “sudden vision” or “apperception” of the “Light of God.”

In the vision, he saw God’s Light surrounding and bathing him. He realized that the Light was God’s very attention itself, personalized. This extraordinary event brought with it a “great sense of joy” and “comfort.”

Such experiences of God’s love, if genuine, yield a commitment to works of love. All visions, all revelations are not worth the least act of humility, says St. John of the Cross, if they do not bear the fruits of love.

Lots of Americans are losing their religion, according to a forthcoming book, *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society*. Somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 churches close every year in the USA. A recent survey conducted by The Wall Street Journal and the University of Chicago had only 39% of Americans claiming religion was very important to them compared to 62% in 1998.

In a secular era, in which traces of God are almost invisible, apocalypses still happen, strongly and unexpectedly. Such radical experiences of God’s love—one of the most profound human experiences—continue to inspire and motivate people to patiently preserve the Faith through the collapse of civility and the demise of reason.

Apocalypse, as described by Cigarettes After Sex, is the end of a culture that seeks happiness in pleasure, in consumption, in arrogant autonomy mistaken for freedom, the fruits of which are violence and injustice.

Apocalypse as described in the Biblical text is the unveiling of a different way of life, the way of perfect love. *The final and ultimate act of compassion is to return from peace to the place where you were tortured to death in order to comfort once more the frightened friends who’d deserted you, denying even having known you.* (Franz Wright)

Apocalypses of divine compassion restore relationships, renew hope, and raise up a community of witnesses to the reality of divine presence. They humanize human beings, give meaning to life, and reveal the final horizon of all creation.