

The weather bureau is wrong so many times that I'm always astonished when they get the prediction right. The more dismal the predictions are, the more people shop. The weather bureau announces bad news so often I'm convinced it is sponsored by department stores with too many snow shovels for sale.

When I think of the thousands of homes without power this week, I count my blessings. Conception Abbey has had no telephone service for several days. I found myself thinking through, well, what would I do if I had no power at the rectory? It's hard to answer because the first thing I'd want to know is who does have power, do they have an extra bedroom, and how good is their cooking?

We owe a debt of gratitude to forecasters and emergency workers who toil in the worst conditions so that we can have light and heat. It's hard to get predictions right.

After Jesus ascended, it was hard to get predictions right about his return. The New Testament assumes the coming of Christ is imminent. The Letter of James gives one example. "Make your hearts firm," he says today, "because the coming of the Lord is at hand." James was expecting Jesus soon, but he'd been making this prediction for a while, and the result wasn't happening. People were getting a little annoyed with him and with Jesus. So James tells them, "Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord." He says if you want to see an example of patience, look at a farmer. Well, I can think of some pretty impatient farmers, but James's point is that the earth will produce fruit after it rains; you just have to wait on it, and farmers learn this as part of their profession. So we too will experience the fruit of our redemption after periods of toil and hardship, but we need patience.

People suffering power outages this week needed patience, too. It's not easy. They have it bad, but we are all always without some kind of power. We always face the possibility of sickness, accident, opposition and death. We are not in control, even when we like to think we are. We do not have power, even when we think we do. One day Jesus the Judge will stand at the gates to put our fears to a final rest and let us behold real power and glory. We live in constant anxiety, but we believe in future glory.

Pope Benedict has a new encyclical on Christian hope, and he says this in the opening lines: "Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey."

Like the weather bureau, Christianity makes a prediction. Our prediction is that Jesus is coming again. We need to be prepared, and we need to have patience. But our belief in his coming gives us hope. It may seem that we are powerless, but we wait in trustworthy hope.