

I am amazed at the recent events in East Germany. The border to the West, closed for so long, has reopened quickly and easily. The breaking of the Berlin Wall brings great hope not only to Germany, but also to the world. The message is that no matter how set things seem to be, they can still change. The concrete Berlin Wall has turned to straw.

East Germany can give hope to any of us who despair. In our own lives we may feel like certain borders have been closed to us. We have family members or former friends that we can't talk to any more. The hope of reconciling with some people seems remote; the border seems closed. Or maybe we've noticed our bodies getting older. We don't heal as quickly as we used to; our reflexes are slower; the first chill of the season sends us wondering if we'll make it through another winter. People get lonely; people get depressed; people despair that the borders will ever open again.

People are alarmed in today's Gospel when Jesus tells them the beautiful temple they admire will be destroyed stone by stone. They hear this as advance notice that if they think life is hard now, it's only going to get worse. They ask Jesus for signs and omens that will warn them. He gives a curious response. He says there will be signs--great signs--but you will likely misinterpret them. There will be wars, earthquakes, and martyrdom, and you'll think they mean that evil has triumphed, but they won't mean that. Signs may signal chaos, but Christ will conquer all. No matter how bad things look, Jesus explains, "not a hair of your head will be harmed. Patient endurance will save you."

My brothers and sisters, in our own day we have seen great signs and omens. In Ireland Catholics fight Protestants. In South Africa blacks and coloreds fight for their rights. The mideast, the land where Jesus walked, is riddled by terrorism. Severe earthquakes have shaken San Francisco and Soviet Armenia. Six Jesuit priests, their cook, and her 15-year old daughter are brutally tortured and massacred in El Salvador.

To look at these signs, we might despair. We might think that the religions of the world are impotent, that humans will never grant basic rights one to another, that the earth under our feet will rebel against us, and that the Gospel of peace is doomed to meet violence. We might despair unless we remember that signs may signal chaos, but Christ will conquer all. If a new day has dawned in Berlin, the sun will rise in El Salvador. And to the darkness inside us, the rays of that sun will bring healing and light.