

*As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.*

My wife and I enjoy reruns of the Andy Griffith shows set in Mayberry, a fictitious town in North Carolina. Occasionally we notice that in the course of some episode and it being North Carolina of the late 1950's/early 1960's that nary a black person is visible. The Mayberry of this delightful comedy is lily white. The same can be said of *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, detective and cowboy shows and most if not all of the movies of the 1930's through 1960 that I saw: very little diversity intruding upon the core content of the films.

I never paid much attention to that during my younger years. Indeed the environments in which I lived and worked and worshipped (schools, neighborhoods, parishes, occupations) were, as we say nowadays, Anglo. Diversity was so marginal as to be out of the range of my vision and ordinary concern. I don't think I was consciously prejudiced, hostile to diversity. I just was not confronted by it that often.

Now I hear that all such films I have referred to were consciously or unconsciously designed to confine me to the colorless, familiar world I was used to – to simplify my life. There is a theory (which I don't fully buy into) that literature, story writing is an attempt to regiment time, to capture it within a past, present and sense of an ending that is cathartic. I mean how many romantic stories end up, after some turmoil, with a kiss and the lovers destined to be married after all?

Closure! Except we are never told how they will be getting along three years or twenty years later, when one died, whether they had kids who turned out to be delinquents . . . all such sad possibilities that are a part of real time – but cut from such scripts to keep life entertaining. The endings had to be absolute, the cowboy hero riding off into the sunset, period. But where? To run into a gunfighter who was faster on the draw than he? We'll never know, though real time allows for the possibility. Our story patterns exclude such revelations. We leave the theatre or lay aside the book feeling closure and story tellers know that's what we want: fiction – even though life remains, as somebody said, "one damn thing after another".

But we know all that. We know we're being conned by happy endings. We know that real time can be even horribly tragic. But writers of such scripts offer us a momentary escape – stories that have a clear cut ending designed to cultivate illusions that serve our need to escape time, tragedy, disorder, confusion – the kind that comes from our culture's *sudden and current* experience of diversity that will have to work its way toward a new experience of solidarity.

In today's Gospel reading, the disciples stand in admiration of the Temple of Jerusalem, symbol of a final, happy ending to Israel's long story from the days of Abraham – offering Israel a monumental sense of an ending after all it's been through over time. And Jesus says: "Not one stone will be left upon another." Every apparent culmination, every sense of an ending to your story will fall apart in one way or another, either through new insights that open up new horizons beyond your current story or through the collapse of "convictions" that were hardly conclusive after all. Yet, as Jesus says, "Not a hair of your head will perish."