

SECOND SUNDAY

OF ADVENT

YEAR A



Prayer

Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun.

May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy.

Reading the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with

righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-9

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so

FIRST READING

Isaiah 11:1-10

PSALM

Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

SECOND READING

Romans 15:4-9

GOSPEL

Matthew 3:1-12

that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”;

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

*Scripture quotations from
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But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Hearing the Word

"Renewal through Harmony"

Building on last Sunday's message, the liturgy of the Second Sunday of Advent focuses on the theme of renewal, identifying harmony as one of the essential dimensions of God's renewed creation.

The prophet Isaiah writes about a leader who will act as God's agent in the world's transformation. This person will have a very definite origin – he will come from "the stump of Jesse." Since Jesse was the father of king David, this new leader will originate from his lineage, he will be "the Son of David". In the biblical language this leader will be later called "the Messiah", which means "the anointed one." Anointing was a way of designating somebody for a very particular role as a king or a priest, a person with

a special mission and purpose. However, this leader will come from the "stump", that is from a remainder of a fallen tree! Isaiah employs this striking image to reflect real, historical circumstances of the time – the Davidic kings were failing as leaders of God's people and the entire dynasty was on its way to collapse. It was to eventually disappear altogether. Isaiah wanted to emphasize that the traditional Jewish hopes connected with the house of David and its kings should not be uncritically applied to this new promised leader. God's Messiah will be a leader of new quality and distinctive purpose.

Isaiah continues revealing that authority of the Messiah will not come from anointing with oil, but through anointing with the Spirit of God. The Spirit will endow him with a unique set of qualities which will enable him to be a capable leader after God's heart: wisdom and understanding for knowing God's will, counsel and strength for implementing it, knowledge and fear of the Lord for serving God faithfully. The purpose of this just, righteous and faithful leader is also made clear – he will not focus on rebuilding the earthly kingdom of David in Palestine, but on restoration of harmony and peace in God's creation. As a result of his work predators will no longer harm grass-grazing animals, and infants will have nothing to fear from snakes. These metaphors clearly evoke the creation narrative from Genesis 2, which paints the picture of a complete harmony that existed at the beginning of creation in the garden of Eden. The prophet alludes to this restored creation, God's "holy mountain", men-

tioned already in last Sunday's readings. God's promised Messiah will work with the power of God's Spirit to renew harmony in creation according to God's intent and design.

In Paul's view, the Christian community anticipates and participates in this renewed creation already in the present time, through harmony among its members. For Paul, to be Christian is to be the "new creation" as an individual, and a part of a community in which harmony and peace abide. Such a community reflects God's original design for humanity. For this reason, concluding his exhortation to the Romans, Paul urges them to pursue harmony and openness to one another which is achieved by hospitality. He begins by invoking the Old Testament as the source of words that bring instruction and encouragement. Those sacred texts reveal what God has originally planned for humanity. They also point to Jesus Christ, God's Messiah, who enables his faithful followers to pursue and achieve these ideals. What did Jesus do? According to Paul, he united humanity previously divided along ethnic and religious lines into Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), into one inclusive people of God. Jesus the Messiah invited and welcomed all believers into that great new creation. He enabled all humanity to participate in this renewed creation by removing divisions between races and peoples.

The first two readings tell of God's purposes and designs for humanity. But how should people respond to what God had planned and then accomplished through his Messiah? The Gospel brings the fierce

figure of John the Baptism into view to answer that question. John's life and ministry fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah (40:3). From of old, God destined John to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah. At the same time, John himself is a prophet who resembles Elijah in his style of life (cf. 2 Kings 1:8). As a prophet, John instructed the people on how to receive and respond to God's Messiah. His message was concise and clear – produce good fruit of repentance. This repentance meant turning away from sin. Although not explicitly stated, it might be inferred that such repentance produces good fruit of harmony and reconciliation among the people, and between people and God. The people receiving John's baptism were doing the right thing. In acknowledging their sinfulness and receiving baptism they were changing their life's orientation and were choosing a morally good path.

Yet, one group incurred John's wrath. These were the members of the two Jewish leadership groups, Pharisees and Sadducees. John attacked them using strong language of judgment and condemnation because, while receiving baptism, they apparently had no intention of "producing the good fruit." Instead of doing what repentance and baptism required, they relied on calling on Abraham their father. This means that they considered their ethnic and religious status as Israelites sufficient in itself, without doing what repentance required. Critiquing the leaders, John emphasized that ethnic and religious association with God's Messiah does not automatically lead to accepting

him and responding to his mission. Later parts of the Gospel of Matthew show that the leaders would stubbornly reject Jesus. They refused to accept him, lacking that openness that was required to accept Jesus as God-sent Messiah.

What is then the right response to God's Messiah? John implied that baptism of the Spirit is necessary. Producing the good fruit means more than just renouncing sins, it means the baptism of the Spirit by Jesus. Such a baptism means placing oneself under the guidance of the Spirit in order to live and act as Jesus does. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit leads believers into full union and harmony with Jesus.

The liturgy of the second Sunday of Advent continues to point to God's plan to renew creation and humanity through the restoration of peace and harmony in it. Jesus, God's Messiah, is instrumental in this process, he is the great restorer. Isaiah described this restorer as the one who, guided by God's Spirit, will restore the harmony of Eden in creation. Paul, appealing to God's intentions already revealed in the Old Testament, urged the Romans to work towards harmony and unity among themselves, imitating Christ who welcomed both Jews and Gentiles into God's family. John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah by bringing people to repentance. This repentance was intended to produce good fruits of forgiveness of sins and restoration of harmony among the people. He also pointed out that the Messiah will "baptize with the Holy Spirit." This baptism would enable believers to act in harmony with Jesus and follow his

teaching. Thus, harmony among believers and union with Jesus constitute first steps towards renewed creation. Participation in this process is the fruit of true repentance required by John, and, according to Paul, a mark of being an authentic disciple of Jesus, God's Messiah. The Psalmist anticipated these days of the Messiah when he stated, "in his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more".

Listening to the Word of God

There is much talk today among Christians within and outside the Catholic Church about the Holy Spirit, and what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Some emphasize the gifts of the Spirit as speaking in tongues and others as healing and deliverance from evil. Is the Holy Spirit, therefore, only concerned with our spiritual lives? In all parts of the world, many continue to suffer, primarily because political leadership and economic systems benefit a minority at the expense of the majority. Can a "Spirit-filled" Christian confront the injustices of economic and political systems and offer a different system built on justice, the common good and equality? What does it mean to be a Spirit-filled Christian living in the modern world in the midst of so many challenges?

In the readings of today we encounter the Holy Spirit acting in ways that may seem unfamiliar. We learn a different meaning of what it means to be Spirit-filled, a meaning that may empower us to respond to the injustices in our contemporary world. The Holy Spirit is concerned with creating harmony among people. That means that the work of the

Holy Spirit stands against injustice, oppression, inequality, suffering and poverty that comes from ruthless leaders and unjust economic and political systems. To be filled with the Spirit is to be concerned about all these issues, not just the spiritual life. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit empowers Christians through His gifts to address these issues intelligently and courageously. These gifts are “wisdom, understanding, counsel and strength”. Thus, with these gifts and knowledge from other disciplines (economics, politics, history, etc.), Christians can challenge existing systems, as well as propose new systems that bring justice for the poor and marginalized. This type of justice, built on the principles of the Gospel, can bring prosperity and harmonious relationships, particularly between rivals, as illustrated through the image of the lamb and lion living peacefully together.

We are all familiar with the violence and divisions driven by ethnicity, tribalism, racism, wars, economic disparities that is destroying our continents, countries, Churches and families. In this context of conflict and injustice, we are called to repent, for example, to repent from non-action and indifference, or from participating in injustice. It is not enough to be sorry or regret our wrongdoing; true repentance is followed by concrete actions that show a difference from what we used to do. This Sunday calls for varied expressions of true repentance, such as confronting unjust political and economic practices, addressing ruthless leaders, fighting for the poor, promoting peace and reconciliation, sharing one's resources

with those in need, working for harmony in our Church community and in the Church. This is what it means to be a Spirit-filled Christian who follows the paths of Jesus in our world. It may seem overwhelming and frightening to even talk about political and economic issues, but we are not alone, the Spirit is with us, and we are with one another. Let us remember this African proverb: “An army of sheep led by a lion can defeat an army of lions led by a sheep.”

Proverb

“An
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Action

Self-examination

Am I, or my community participating in divisive practices, religious, ethnic, economic, in and outside of my Church community or country?

Am I person who creates harmony or brings conflict? Why?

Response to God

I pray to the Holy Spirit to empower me to do the work of reconciliation and bridge-building in the place where I live.

Response to your World

I will identify a situation where I can do something concrete in order to bring about an increase in harmony and cooperation among those involved.

We will plan to visit an organization that is involved in justice and reconciliation work in our community. How can we support their work?

Prayer

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

(St Theresa of Avila)