

Readings for Tuesday the First Week of Advent

FIRST READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

On that day, A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A Spirit of counsel and of strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. On that day, The root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, The Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

The word of the Lord.

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

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king, and with your justice, the king's son; He shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted ones with judgment.

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace, till the moon be no more. May he rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

He shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save.

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

May his name be blessed forever; as long as the sun his name shall remain. In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed; all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

GOSPEL: Luke 10:21-24

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Tuesday the First Week of Advent

What can lie beneath the surface? There can be deep roots of what seems to be a dead tree-stump. When I was a kid, my family would visit my dad's cousin who owned a farm just south of Kokomo Indiana. There was a white-washed seemingly dead, rotting oak tree stump in the front yard of her house. My father used to spend his summers on that farm with his aunt and uncle in the early to middle 1930s. It was a dead, rotting stump then. Each time we visited in the 1960s, also in the summer, there would be live, green shoots with leaves spouting out and around the stump. The life of that tree went deep. I always remember that stump when I read this passage.

However, I don't think that Isaiah was talking about dead trees. He referred to people and individuals. His message was to the people of Judah before the Babylonian captivity and subsequent Diaspora. There was still a king of David's lineage who ruled in Jerusalem. Babylon threatened Judah with invasion. Destruction had not yet begun. The images of dead tree-stumps with deep, living roots had not yet begun to make sense to a people still living in their homes with a king, temple and in their the land of God's promise. Isaiah's words were more ominous rather than hopeful. The leader upon whom God's Spirit would rest was a real figure who would save Jerusalem and its people from being overrun by the enemy. The leader would rule in God's place; doing and judging as God would. It proved to be a vainglorious promise. We, as Christians, believe that Isaiah's prophesy led to Jesus whose death on the cross saved us and whose rising from death gave us the promise of eternal life.

Through this leader the poor and afflicted, the ruthless and the wicked would know God's justice. Justice, as a belt, would hold up his pants. Faithfulness would be like his pockets; using these analogies in contemporary images. What we hear in that prophesy is not necessarily what God hears. We will identify ourselves as poor and afflicted. However we are sinners, the wicked and ruthless ones too. We all share a basic and fallen human nature. All people need God's forgiveness and transformation. Justice for God is always forgiveness of sins. Faith and being faithful are God's gifts; grace that can change a person. Isaiah's message is not for a few but all of us. Believing in God gives us ears of faith to hear Isaiah's words and understand God's message and intent.

The transformation that God offers is radical and deep. Wolves eat lambs. I like lamb, veal and capretto (look it up) too. The various images of carnivorous and dangerous beasts being transformed into docile and safe critters prefigure the transformation of a person like Saul into Paul. He who persecuted Christians became the Church's greatest preacher. God will transform us likewise. I maintain that each of us is a sprout of Jesse. Jesse was King David's father. God is our father and Jesus is our brother. Our witness to faith that we give as we live is the signal to the nations. God works through us in our actions and words whether we know it or not. I think that if we know that truth, we can become intentional not accidental witnesses more often.

If I define God's justice as God's forgiveness, which comes out of God's infinite and unconditional love, the Psalm's response can take on new meaning. Instead of righting wrong we cannot to, since no one can make what's wrong to be right and no one can undue past deeds, we forgive other's wrongs to share God's true justice. Others can forgive us too. The notion of God's peace is sometimes elusive. I was born at the end of the Korean War. The United States had been fighting a war in some place in the world for my entire life. There is always a seemingly impossible problem to face. The world can be a threatening place. It can be hard for people to agree; opinions always clash. We all face anxiety. How does God give peace? The Psalm speaks of the fullness of it forever. Does God mean that peace will only come to us when we die? I don't believe Carl Marx, religion is not the opiate of the masses. God's promise is real now. If not the message of scripture is worthless and bad not good news.

We can catch glimpses of God's peace. We can experience snatches of it. In the midst of pandemic, politics and prejudice we can experience the presence of God. In the time I've spent in preparation for this reflection I have prayed. I've asked the Spirit to open my ears, eyes, heart and mind to hear, see, feel and know the presence of God. It works. God's presence can bring peace. God is never far. We only need to travel from our heads to our hearts, never having to leave the place we are. Jesus words are true; when ever two or three gather in my name, I am with them. This can be over the phone, if not face

to face. We can still meet face to face if we keep adequate social distance, wear a mask and wash our hands. God will always be the link that unites us all. We can always forgive and can always pray.

I have a friend. He's very well read and knowledgeable. He has a very deep and abiding sense of God's presence. Yet there is a prayer that has always eluded him. It's called the Jesus Prayer. It is an ancient, Russian Orthodox prayer that goes back more than one thousand years. It is very simple. Praying it has two basic components. One simply breathes in and out while one remembers these words, "Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me." Inhale on, "Jesus son of God," and exhale on, "Have mercy on me." One simply repeats this over and over. I started to do it one day after driving home from Bridgeport to Skokie while traffic was at a stand-still. I left at three in the afternoon and arrived at my destination at eight at night. From then on the prayer has helped my demeanor and has been an alternative to noticing all the other idiots on the road. It is a Christian mantra, method of meditation and a means to contemplation. Praying the prayer teaches and reinforces the prayer. I learned about it from a small book, "The Way of a Pilgrim," written by an anonymous fellow pilgrim. St. Paul has instructed us to pray always and unceasingly. This prayer is one way to do that. My friend always wanted a book to read that revealed the mystery of the prayer. He wanted to know how and why it worked. He was always frustrated and perplexed when I told him that the mystery of the prayer was in the praying of it, not reading of it.

Having told this story, I have to add that this man has a very rich and deep spiritual life. Cleverness, learning and wit got in his way, and gets in mine to notice God's movement in life. It's sometimes easier to talk about God than to face God. What Jesus has told us in this passage is the intimacy God has with us.

Scriptures were written in Hebrew and Koine Greek. We all read the bible in translation. There is a plethora of bible translations. Some can be literal almost word for word. Others are written to give the best meaning of the ancient readings. The translation we, as Catholics, use is Revised New American Bible. Some times the words it uses are descriptive and sometimes word for word. Today's reading uses the word, "childlike." The actual Greek word means, "Infants." Others use terms like, "uninitiated," or "little children." Each of these translated terms has a connotation. I prefer, "infants."

What has God hidden? Why would God keep it from the learned and clever? Does the hiding constitute malice? Jesus speaks about people knowing him and knowing God. Some people do not seem to know God. Faith in God is a gift that God gives. Knowing God is part of that gift. How well do we trust God to give the gift? There's an experience of prayer we've all had. All of a sudden the thought of God serendipitously pops into our mind. It comes from nowhere. It is unbidden but there. Since we all believe, we already have God's gift of faith. I maintain that experience is the closest we can come to know the moment of first inspiration. God works in God's own time. We know the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Nothing is hidden from us. Anyone who seeks God already has the gift. My friend has it too. His desire to know the inner workings of the prayer is part of his search for God's presence.

Jesus blessing, at the end of the story as he turned to the disciples, is for us. Sometimes the true notion of blessing can elude us. Blessing is merely the awareness of the presence of God. Sometimes, with the blessing of rosaries, homes and cars, we can think that a place or thing gets, at the moment of blessing, an infusion of holiness. Only God is holy. All creation is holy by the fact that creation has come from God. There is an ancient Jewish form of prayer, "May it be a blessing," or, "May their memory be a blessing." We may discover the presence of God where we are right now. I do this as I type these words. Hopefully, you discover God's presence as you read them. If you do, it's by God's grace and not my eloquence. We see and hear as Jesus intended.

The promise and plan of God has unfolded since the first people. It continued through the words of scripture. God reveals God's presence to us now. Nothing is hidden for us for we believe. We can see our world, present events and our fellow pilgrims through eyes of Faith.

May God give us the patience to keep each other safe.

James D. Beath
December 1, 2020