

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Dec 3rd 2013

Here we are, on the second weekday of Advent, and therefore on the second weekday of the new Liturgical year, 2013-2014. This third day of Advent builds wonderfully on the visions of the readings for the First Sunday and Monday of Advent, visions of universal peace and restoration, beginning with the restoration of the tribes of Israel, then reaching out to all the nations of the world.

Like most of the readings during this special season of Advent, today's texts flow together to tell a single story. They speak to the deepest of human desires for rescue, healing, restoration, and the peace that embodies all that is meant by the Hebrew word *shalom*—the full flourishing of the people of God in covenant union with their Creator and Redeemer.

Isaiah speaks of a future son of David, who will rule with justice, with a special concern for the poor. The images that the prophet uses to illustrate the ultimate *shalom* of this king's rule are expressed with an exuberance that can stretch our credulity. The lamb will offer hospitality to the wolf (which sounds like the beginning of an Aesop fable that will end up poorly for the lamb). The carnivorous lion will go vegetarian to dine with the ox. The infant will play without harm near the cobra's den. These images evoke a peace that is beyond what we can reasonably expect either from nature or from the greatest of human efforts. And that is exactly the point: such peace requires "outside help"—the Spirit of the Lord. That is why Isaiah climaxes his vision, twice, with references to the "fear" and "knowledge of the Lord." Only with human cooperation with the source of all creation and redemption will full *shalom* come about. Only when we behave as creatures of a loving God do we experience the beginnings of the fulfillment of the prophet's visions.

Psalm 72 elaborates Isaiah's picture of the son of David who will rule over such a peace. Again, the onset of peace is linked with special attention to justice for the poor.

Finally, four verses from the Gospel of Luke proclaim how the fulfillment of the promises of the prophet and the psalmist took a quantum leap in the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Messiah. Those of us who have come to know the love and power of God in the humanity of Jesus have begun to see what the world had been looking for.

Christ deniers will continue to taunt Christians with the question: "If Jesus is the Messiah, where is the peace and justice that is supposed to accompany the messianic age?" In faith and hope, we answer that the promises have only *BEGUN* to be fulfilled; we have experienced that beginning, and we continue to pray, as Jesus taught us, "Thy kingdom come." The point of Advent, and the season's reading, is to help us face up to the remaining gap between promise and fulfillment and to nurture the hope that the peace we still hunger for lies in the further manifestation of our risen Lord. The spectacular missionary

work of St. Francis Xavier, whose feast we celebrate today, was energized by this kind of faith and hope. The promised “outside help” depends on our cooperation with our Creator and our acknowledgment that we can’t do this on our own small strength. Lord Jesus, come!

Dennis Hamm, S.J.