

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Dec 1st 2015

We are in our first week of Advent and full of anticipation. Many are also full of angst as we struggle to balance all that needs to be done to prepare for Christmas. The lists get longer and longer – cards, food, gifts, parties, concerts and special musicals; at times, we forget what it is that we are really preparing for during these weeks in December.

The late November Thanksgiving holiday in the United States, was a bump in the road as Christmas decorations have been out commercially since end of summer. Many are still nursing the bruises from Black Friday and admiring the bargains that were gathered. Yet our readings foretell of the wonders of the future – what we have to look forward to – not because of bargains and lights but because of the birth of a very special Child.

Our first reading really sets the stage as we hear of the shoot that sprouts from the stump of Jesse. This miracle will happen and all sorts of amazing things will follow.

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:

a Spirit of wisdom and understanding.

A Spirit of counsel and strength,

a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord,

and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord.

I resisted as I read these words from Isaiah. They offer hope and a future that we would all embrace.

Yet as I struggled to write this reflection, I was bombarded with the news of horrible deeds committed against one another. I see fear in our approach to others and a gloom of what the future may be. I try to reconcile this hope with this reality. I falter, I take days to write this because it seems at such odds with what is in front of me yet so aligned with what I dream the future can/will be.

Even as a small child, I marveled at the idea of the wolf and the lamb being together, to think of a child being safe as he or she played with snakes. What a fantasy world awaits us – where pain and suffering is no more. How do we hold our faith and continue to believe in such a world? Perhaps that is the main reason (truly the only reason) that we celebrate Christmas every year. It is not to exchange the newest technology or to bestow on our children every new toy being marketed. It is to remind us that the root of Jesse has come and is a signal for the nations. The promises of Isaiah are not for us now but rather what will be in the second coming – we have our first gift in the birth of Christ and now have an obligation of how we live with that gift in anticipation of the next time He comes.

I have the privilege of being with my newest grandchild as I finally write this. Actually, it was holding her and looking at her sleeping face that finally gave me the courage to really look at this reading and the future that it predicts. In her face, I see the future and all that is good, I believe that there is so

much more to this world. In the words of Robert Browning:

Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand who saith, 'A whole I planned, youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!' (the bolding is mine!)

As we decorate for Christmas and plan all the festivities for this season, let us not forget the Reason for the Season and look to that promised future and walk the path necessary to get there. Let's prepare our hearts as carefully as that special meal and the fantastic tree with a star atop glowing with hope and anticipation of what is to come!!

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