

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Dec 2nd 2015

Behold, the Lord comes to save His people!

The readings for the middle of the first week of Advent are full of joyous anticipation for the coming of the Lord. To symbolize the great times to come, we are led to imagine that joyful people of all nations will enjoy a feast of rich, juicy foods and fine wines. Their gladness is heightened by the sure knowledge (...for the LORD has spoken) that God will lift the veil that veils all people, and destroy death forever. The first reading sets the tone for the anticipatory thoughts that, gently, but insistently, bring us, through an appeal to our senses, to the realization that the Lord is coming. Be happy and rejoice; one can literally sense the goodness of the Lord.

Psalm 23, which many of us know by heart, also brings the image of restful and joyful times to come. We give ourselves up like sheep to the shepherd. Our fears of evil subside, while a watchful and loving God protects us, feeds us, and shelters us, all the days of our lives. The feelings of warmth, safety, and well-being are nearly palpable. These feelings alone would be sufficient if we were truly, primarily, concerned with what is in store for our living, human selves. We are also promised that we will be cared for all the days of our lives; we literally are being offered a place in the house of God.

We certainly must rejoice at this news! If we only can concentrate on our spiritual salvation, we will have received the good news of advent, and acted appropriately. After all, we already have received the greatest gift...a promise that we will be with God, and we will never die.

The first reading begins with the phrase, “on this mountain the Lord of Hosts will provide for all people a feast...”. The gospel for this day in Advent is also set on a high place. Like so many other gospel scenes, Jesus is on a hill by the Sea of Galilee. Even today, this relatively small body of fresh water is beautiful and surrounded by hills. It is fed and drained by the Jordan River. Jesus obviously loved to spend time in this part of Galilee. While sitting on a hillside overlooking the water, he found a natural amphitheater from which to address large crowds. One day, a crowd arrived bringing with them many people who were blind, lame, mute, and challenged by illnesses. They had heard that Jesus had the power to heal. The crowd “placed them at his feet, and he cured them.” After three days of witnessing Jesus’ cures, the crowd was so hungry that Jesus took pity on them. He blessed seven loaves of bread and a few fish that the disciples had with them. The disciples distributed the food and later, it was found that seven baskets of food were left over. Another miracle had occurred.

This gospel reminds me of the folk tale, “Stone Soup”. Although there is no miracle in the story, in the end, it may be very much what Jesus, through today’s gospel, meant to teach us. Villagers in the story were starving, and a new-comer suggested that they boil water in a large pot and add a stone; a very good soup could be made. Upon tasting it, it was determined that it might be a little better if they could only find some potatoes...some were found. More tasting ensued... maybe add a few onions...some cabbage...and finally, some meat was found. When everyone gave what little they had, they had a large and nourishing meal. “They all ate and were satisfied,” to quote today’s gospel. Was Jesus teaching the crowd (and now us) that we already have been provided for If we only care, and love one another enough to share? If we learn this, we will have more than enough to satisfy us. Sometimes, we have to cooperate with God and be patient. A miracle will occur. The Lord will come. Blessed are those who are prepared to meet Him.

Tom Quinn-Creighton University's Medical School Admissions Department