

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Dec 25th 2017

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown. ...the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed...

For a Child is born to us.... they name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

His dominion is vast and forever peaceful...which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever,

He shall rule the world with justice and the peoples with his constancy.

For today in the city of David, a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger.

The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to ... live temperately, justly, and devoutly...eager to do what is good.

(texts from the Mass of the Nativity of the Lord – During the Night)

In the texts for Christmas, including the readings given us for the Mass at Dawn and During the Day, one hears the ache of a people who have suffered endlessly, longing for one who would set them free and establish a kingdom of peace and justice. We also hear the fulfillment of that hope and promise: in Jesus, a savior is born, the “grace of God has appeared,” now we will enjoy a time of prosperity and peace. But wait... fulfillment?

I wonder what first century Christians would say if they were to travel through time and see our world today. Maybe something like this, “There are over 65 million refugees in the world today, not just from fighting between nations, but fighting within nations?!? People don’t agree on how to take care of our common home, our earth, one of the most precious gifts given to us next to life itself?!? But where is the peace that God’s saving power ushered in through Jesus? Is there peace in your communities, your homes, your hearts?

We keep forgetting that God’s coming is not only a past event in human history, but a continual present and future reality. God did not come in human form to live, die and rise and then leave the rest for us to figure out. We are not just hanging out passively until God comes again in glory. Like good parents whose relationships with their children transform as they mature, Jesus’s arrival was only the beginning of our maturing relationship with God as we learn to be people of peace, creating a more just and peaceful world.

In Jesus, the eternal birthing of God arrives in humanity for all time and all space; not in a flash of power and authority but in the wonder-full ordinariness of a young Jewish woman giving birth after nurturing in her own body a growing life for nine months. God comes to us in a small gift, in the helpless vulnerability of a baby. How does God come to us and invite our maturing? We might look in ordinary places like our homes and our work places; we might try noticing small things like the urge to forgive one who has hurt us, the desire for reconciliation in our families, the longing for better health. We might look to our communities to those who need refuge, shelter, food, employment; what one thing can I do to make a difference in someone’s life?

In *The Reed of God*, Caryll Houselander, a lay catholic woman of the early 20th century writes:

“if Christ is growing in us, if we are at peace, recollected, because we know that however insignificant our life seems to be, from it He is forming Himself; if we go with eager wills, ‘in haste,’ to wherever our circumstances compel us, because we believe that He desires to be in that place, we shall find that we are driven more and more to act on the impulse of His love.

“And the answer we shall get from others to those impulses will be an awakening into life, or the leap into joy of the already wakened life within them.

“It is only necessary to give ourselves to that life (growing within us)...to pray without ceasing, not by a continual effort to concentrate our minds but by a growing awareness that Christ is being formed in our lives from what we are. We must trust him for this....”

The Grace of God has appeared... may Christ find a welcome home in our hearts today and in the days to come.

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