

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Dec 7th 2015

Memorial of Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

I have lived my whole life in Omaha, Nebraska, a place in the middle of the United States with discernible, if not exasperating, climactic seasons. We have extremes, at times within the span of hours and days, between heat and cold. We have rain, and snow, and sleet, and hail, and thunder and lightning. We also have balmy summer afternoons, gentle spring breezes, brisk autumn afternoons, and crisp sunny winter days. We expect change, but we also receive much variety. But we also can become complacent with our good fortune, because we rarely suffer truly disastrous conditions.

When I read today's excerpt from Isaiah, I couldn't help but feel the contrast between my norm and that of the people Isaiah was addressing. Their bleak climate had much less variety than does mine, and their endowment of natural resources was probably much smaller than the abundance of moisture and flora that I enjoy. So it does not surprise me that Isaiah would emphasize repeatedly that the glory of the Lord, the splendor of God, would change their environment to one of abundant moisture, profuse flora and blooms, and relief from the parched norm. If one lives in the desert, I suspect the dream would be to have a green garden free from dryness, baking heat and searing winds.

Isaiah also reminds the people who have parched attitudes, and ears deaf to the cries of those about them, and eyes blind to the needs of their neighbors, that they too will be strengthened in their infirmities when the Lord comes. He paints a picture of great celebration at the good God will bring to those who are redeemed. The place he describes, after God has come with vindication, seems almost Eden-like, as if the Garden has been recreated. He certainly knows his audience, for those gifts would have likely resonated greatly with the Hebrews. And the psalm response celebrates the coming of the Lord who will bring peace, truth and justice, who will change the status quo and bring salvation, who will bring the kingdom of God to the world as we know it.

There are many times in my life when I feel parched, when my strength to do what I know I should is feeble, when my eyes are blind to the needs of my neighbors and my ears are deaf to their cries, when I am lamed by my fears. Isaiah reminds me that I will be quenched, and strengthened, and made whole, and leap with joy and gladness, when the Lord returns and brings salvation. And I know my abundant salvation will be even more gratifying because I have experienced dryness and felt despair, and can recognize my own limitations.

Then comes Jesus. He is redemption. He is salvation. He justifies. In Jesus I am quenched, and strengthened, and can see and hear again. I am made whole and saved. The world experiences true peace, if it only listens and follows. The kingdom of God is manifest in the world as we know it, if we only help bring it about by following the example of our Messiah.

And so my prayer today, as I experience anew this Advent season, is for the grace to pray from my dryness, and feebleness, and lameness, and blindness, and deafness, so when I feel Jesus on me I can more joyfully sing out in celebration.

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