

## Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Nov 29th 2016

### Desiring Patient Fidelity

In selecting today's first reading for the liturgy in the first week of Advent, the Church announces with great confidence that however bad things have become in the realm of human life and relationships, they are about to change. The Messiah, savior of the people, will come. This prince, born of the house of Jesse (David's Father) will be filled so full of the Spirit of God that the Divine Presence that fills him with wisdom and understanding, counsel and courage, discernment and holiness, will spill out over all creation causing natural enemies to seek each other out in companionship so peaceful and so rich that all of creation – not just humanity – but the world of animals, bugs and plants will participate in the fecundity of that peace.

For Christians, this text should be describing our present world – the world that Christ's death and resurrection brought to pass. If we believed in the truth of Jesus' Incarnation and Paschal Mystery – the heart of the Christian understanding about reality – we would see ourselves sharing in the outpouring of the spirit with those wondrous gifts, and those around US would know the glory of the Lord. I have to ask myself during these days leading to Christmas why that isn't more the case.

When I am feeling a bit wolfish, and my hackles are up, will the gentle (and vulnerable) lambs among my colleagues invite me to dinner? If I am ranging about like a leopard looking for prey to pounce on, does the baby goat seek me out to snuggle up to? (Not even my big dog seeks me out when I am as threatening as that!) I suspect the strong, but still vulnerable calves in our herd are not prepared to graze in the same pasture as the teenage lions strutting around learning to hunt, much less will they dwell in a neighborhood with a bear down the street.

In other words, developing friendship and establishing real peace as God intends it calls for behavior that is gentle, merciful and vulnerable – even from the wolves, leopards, lions and bears in us or among us. Further, we have to trust that we have been given the Divine Spirit to move beyond our sinful impulses of division, “me-first-ism,” dominance and control. The season of Advent reminds us to gaze at the promise of what we can be when “God is With Us” (Emmanuel) and we are with God. To dwell on God's Holy Mountain in this life is to host a feast of joy, a feast of forgiveness, and a feast of humility in cooperation with the Shoot from Jesse's stump that wants to bloom in our hearts. Jesus gives us the place and invites the guests from among those who need our prayers, our forgiveness, our repentance, our hope, our talents, our material resources. We provide the banquet out of our generosity, our courage, our mercy among those who are frightened, weak, voiceless and neglected among us.

As Jesus points out in today's Gospel, we are greatly blessed if we have heard the Gospel. Kings and prophets desired to have the wealth of grace that we have received by hearing and experiencing the fulfillment of the messianic promise. As I spend time in prayer these next weeks, my heart will focus on the desire not to lose the great wealth by inattention, disbelief, or penury; but to give the banquet of love away profligately, because that is the only way to dwell on God's Holy Mountain in 2017.

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