

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Dec 11th 2017

Do yourself a favor this Advent season and just sit and savor today's first reading. The more times I read it, the richer it became. It pointed me in so many different directions. But no matter which path I followed, all the roads led me to hope.

First, I traveled down the road to Mount Carmel. As a senior in college, I spent my fall semester at the University of Haifa in Israel which is located on Mount Carmel. We would joke that on a clear day, we could see Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Thinking back to that view, I never saw countries. I only saw the beautiful hills and mountains. God's handiwork was not marred by artificial borders. The mountains did not distinguish themselves by country...all were God's children in those mountain ranges.

Another road I traveled with this reading was when things are difficult and painful, trying to remember it will not always be that way. We all go through bad patches in our lives where are "hearts are frightened" or our "knees are weak". Isaiah is telling us to "Be strong, fear not" because "Here is your God.....who comes to save you." Isn't that comforting? Doesn't that give you hope?

We just need to be reminded in tough times that our lives, our communities will not always be in turmoil. One of the meetings I attended this month documented the reductions in gun violence and murders in north Omaha. Right after that presentation, an older African American woman spoke up: "It was so bad for so long that none of us thought it could ever get better. But working together and believing that God was in control helped us overcome this nightmare." God is always with us in our pain and suffering. It is just that we can't always feel God's presence as we inch forward in faith to a better place.

What about the highway where "no one unclean may pass over it"? How can I make myself clean so that I can follow God's "holy way"? In what areas of my life am I separating myself from others? As our country becomes more and more polarized, how I am contributing to this frightening separation of God's children? Instead of being petty and smug about my opinions, how can I learn to circle back to what we have in common versus on what we strongly disagree?

Helping myself become "clean" was given a big boost as I read You Will Not Have My Hate by Antoine Leiris. His wife was killed in a terrorist attack in Paris. He wrote:

"On Friday night, you stole the life of an exceptional being, the love of my life, the mother of my child, but you will not have my hate....I will not give you the satisfaction of hating you. That is what you want, but to respond to your hate with anger would be to yield to the same ignorance that made you what you are...There are only two of us — my son and myself — but we are stronger than all the armies of the world....and all his life this little boy will defy you by being happy and free. Because you will not have his hate either."

Reading this daily will help me become clean so that no one can have my hate either.

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