

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT Dec. 8, 2013

On this second Sunday of Advent, the scriptures written previously for our instruction zoom in on the preaching of John in the desert, preparing a way for the coming of a mightier one who will baptize with the fiery Spirit. There is a long history of God's dealing with creation leading up to that. The call of Abraham to leave home, the promised land, the Egyptian slavery, Moses and the Law, the exodus, the judges and kings, the episodes of exiles and returns, Israel's prophets and martyrs – all of this experience over centuries stirred up in the chosen people a longing and expectation that what was foreshadowed and prophesied would be fulfilled. One day God would send his anointed one, a Messiah and king like David, to govern the people with justice, rescue the poor and the afflicted, be a blessing for all the peoples of the earth.

He would be a sprout from the root of Jesse, endowed with the gifts of the Spirit of the Lord: wisdom and understanding, counsel and knowledge, courage, and fear of God. He would establish a peaceable kingdom with the qualities of the first paradise. Intimacy with God would be restored in Emmanuel, and all discord in nature will cease, so that the wolf and lamb, calf and lion will browse together. Brother killing brother, war, hatred and disaster will cease because of an inner peace in each one, living rightly before God. "There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord." We know we are not there yet. Just look at the world and look at the dividedness within our selves. Still here has been a giant step toward the coming of that restored innocent creation. Paul called it the 'fullness of time' when "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it."

In preparation for the public ministry of that Son in Jesus, a precursor. John was no reed blown hither and thither by the wind. With an ax of urgency he hacked at the roots of exploitation, greed, and oppression in people of highest and lowest class. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Repent, that is change your ways; collect only what is your due, stop extortion, share your cloak and food with the needy.

In fulfilling his mission as precursor, John knew that he was not the one who was to come, the prophet like Moses, or Elijah. He would have to decrease in the light of the one who came after him who would baptize with the Spirit and fire. John's mission was to the children of Israel. Jesus was sent so that all who believe in him, obey his commandments, and follow his example, Jew and Gentile together, may dwell in his kingdom of peace and eternal blessedness.

As we continue our Advent journey toward the celebration of the birth of our Savior, we can only celebrate it worthily by putting away the works of darkness, rejecting wrong desires, awaking from the blindness of our own failings in knowing ourselves as God knows us. Each one of us must do our part to produce good fruit as evidence of our repentance. God can raise up sons and daughters from 'stones,' like idolaters, atheists, the hard hearted, the indifferent, to take their places at the eternal banquet while the overconfident, the presumptuous, are rejected. "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons by its power? Did we not do many miracles in your name as well?" To this Jesus replied: "I never knew you. Out of my sight."

Advent is about expectation, anticipation and preparation for the arrival of someone of importance or significance in our lives. Liturgically it is a reminder that, as Karl Rahner said in a reading this morning, it is about the inbreaking of God into human history seen as a continuous action of grace. It is the same Christ yesterday at his incarnation, Christ today in the word and sacrament and assembly, and Christ forever in glory in the kingdom he is preparing for those who are his true followers.

We know the miseries and hurts we cause to ourselves and others by giving in to the weaknesses of the flesh and

spirit. We cannot save ourselves. God knows us even better than we do, and his mercy is without end. He has given us the proof of his love by sending us his only Son so that those who believe in him might have eternal life. As we turn back to the altar and prepare the one acceptable sacrifice we have to offer to God, the Father's gift of his Son, we are privileged to join him in his self-oblation, in self-emptying and total surrender to God's will. By endurance, by perseverance and accepting the encouragement God has given and still gives us daily, we have hope. In it we will grow toward that perfect love that casts out all fear. In thanksgiving for so many blessings let us say, may the name of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be blessed and praised for ever. Amen