

2nd Sunday Advent Year “A”

Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matt. 3:1-12

December 8, 2013

Of all the jobs in the Bible, I’d have to say that being a prophet must have been amongst the most difficult. St. John the Baptist must have felt very alone, frustrated that more people did not listen to him. St. Matthew clearly sees in the person of John the prophet about whom Isaiah had written in chapter 40 of his work. While the prophets often were severe in their judgments about Israel, at other times were very comforting in their words. It is not intrinsic to the nature of a prophet that his message would be rejected. They always sought to predict, to warn, to point beyond themselves to another.

The Church carries out a prophetic message equally valid in our time. An individual priest has a teaching role, united under the leadership of the bishop and derived from him. But it is the bishop alone who teaches in an official way as a member of the College of Bishops. Christ willed the teaching role of the Church, for he desired to protect his flock. We use the term *Magisterium* to denote this specific teaching office:

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.¹

The Magisterium is a service to the truth, and in service to the Word of God, not above it. How unfortunate when it is equated with power. Christ fulfills his prophetic office through you, the faithful members of the laity as well. This is primarily done through evangelization, when you proclaim the truth and joy of the faith to the world.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #85, quoting Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum DV 10 § 2*

St. John the Baptist preached a message that many, perhaps even most, did not want to hear. He called people to repentance, and his own manner of living only served to highlight the radical nature of his teaching. Still, he always was pointing to Christ, never to himself. Rather, John pointed to the Truth and showed us how to live in the truth by means of our lives of repentance.

To live in the truth in a prophetic way demands help from above. One indispensable aid may be found in the enumeration of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. First mentioned in our first reading, they serve as an impetus for spiritual growth and an antidote to all forms of hatred and jealousy that threaten to keep us imprisoned in our own sin. Isaiah predicted a world in which “the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid...” That kind of world can only come about with grace from on high.

This is because evil lures us in and presents itself as tasty, even innocuous, until it completely grabs hold of us. I think one could say that at times throughout history it can take the form of hatred or racist attitudes towards others, passed down through generations. Slowly but surely, the damage has been done. Evil seeps its way into our lives almost imperceptibly. We lose sight of right and wrong as a society; we become blind to injustice or at least indifferent.

Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, President of the USCCB recently remarked following the death of President Nelson Mandela: “In his struggle against apartheid rule, Nelson Mandela was a light for peace and equality in his country and for the whole world. His years of imprisonment exemplified the suffering experienced by so many who seek justice.”²

² Statement of Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, USCCB President, December 6, 2013.

Our response is neither one of retreat nor still less surrender, but one of engagement with the darkness present in the world by means of shining the light of Truth on anything and everything in our sights. We do so with a consistent ethic of life, one that addresses the evils of abortion and unjust discrimination, euthanasia and poverty, stem cell research and capital punishment. Our issues today may not be the same as they were 2000 years ago, but the Gospel is the same, and it is brought to bear in the modern world, in our time. That is our challenge and the Gospel is our best hope.

Our faith is based on the conviction that Jesus Christ's winnowing fan will clear the way, separating the wheat from the chaff, the latter representing the debris separated from the seed in threshing grain, and it will be burned with unquenchable fire.