

2nd Sunday of Advent A

*Treat each other in the same friendly way
as Christ treated you. (Rm 15:7)*



First Reading

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, a scion thrusts from his roots; on him the spirit of the Lord rests, a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and power, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. (The fear of the Lord is his breath.) He does not judge by appearances, he gives no verdict on hearsay, but judges the wretched with integrity, and with equity gives a verdict for the poor of the land. His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless, his sentences bring death to the wicked. Integrity is the loincloth round his waist, faithfulness the belt about his hips.

The wolf lives with the lamb, the panther lies down with the kid, calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear make friends, their young lie down together. The lion eats straw like the ox. The infant plays over the cobra's hole; into the viper's lair the young child puts his hand. They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain, for the country is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters swell the sea.

That day, the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples. It will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.

Second Reading

Romans 15:4-9

Everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God. And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It can only be to God's glory, then, for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you. The reason Christ became the servant of circumcised Jews was not only so that God could faithfully carry out the promises made to the patriarchs, it was also to get the pagans to give glory to God for his mercy, as scripture says in one place: For this I shall praise you among the pagans and sing to your name.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand." This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said: A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father', because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out."

Meditation

At the time of John's ministry there were in the desert religious groups who multiplied purification rites. John, however, preached a unique baptism before the judgment, and that baptism was a baptism of repentance. With a prophetic insight, he sees the axe which already strikes at the foundations of the entire world.

John announces that with the coming of the kingdom, a crisis is very near, a crisis which we will only be able to face through penance, the fruit of conversion. Is he not Elijah who has come back for the conversion of all things by fire? Among his hearers we find men of importance who will bring upon Jesus suffering and pain. John foresees them burning as straw after the harvest. But as the "Voice" of the Messiah he considers himself unworthy of preceding Jesus. His baptism is only of water, not of the Spirit.

We acknowledge our uneasiness before this hard and pure prophet. We must recognize that the God who is both awesome and merciful manifests His power both in the clap of thunder and the gentle breeze.

The Baptist's message calls Jew and Christian to the realization that we come under God's judgment by living in God's love. "For stern as death is love ... its flames are a blazing fire" (Song of Songs 8:6). The Baptist keeps us from taking lightly God's love for us. His gospel is an Advent text which forces us to look toward the appearance of the King, who from this day until the last day, separates the chaff from the wheat.