

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - A  
Isaiah 11:1-10;  
Romans 15:4-9;  
Matthew 3:1-12  
Little Flower - 12/8/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Advent. Poet Archibald MacLeish once wrote that symbols speak to us more powerfully than ideas. For example, as Christians, we believe that Christ came into the world to save us from our sins, to reconcile us to God and to one another. This is an idea. On the other hand, the crucifix is a symbol of reconciliation. The vertical bar suggests the reconciliation of heaven and earth, God and humanity. The horizontal bar suggests the reconciliation of human beings with one another. All of this was accomplished through Jesus stretched out on the cross. The crucifix, then, is a powerful symbol.

Both last Sunday's and this Sunday's readings from the Prophet Isaiah offer symbols rather than ideas. Imagine for a moment individuals and peoples beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Today's reading from Isaiah has even more powerful symbolism. Imagine a wolf and lamb, a leopard and a kid, a calf and a young lion, a cow and a bear living in harmony and peace together. Imagine for a moment a baby playing safely by a cobra's den or a child laying his hand on the adder's lair without harm. We can hardly imagine such scenes in the real world in which we live. However, this is precisely the world Jesus came to bring. As he said in John's Gospel, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*" [14:27].

Jesus' historical coming 2000 years ago marked the beginning of this new world envisioned in Isaiah. Jesus' coming in glory at the end of time will mark the fulfillment of the vision when there will be new heavens and a new earth. The seed of the kingdom has been planted in our hearts. It is now up to us to live the kingdom of Christ in our lives.

One of the reasons the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus was because he was not the messiah they wanted him to be. In Jesus' time, Israel was under the power of Rome. Therefore, they wanted a messiah who would free them from the Romans. Jesus, however, proclaimed that the only true freedom is freedom from sin which requires a change of heart and a change of life.

The primary effect of sin is alienation, whether alienation from God, others, the physical world, or ourselves. Every time we sin, we create new walls and barriers and divisions between ourselves and God, between ourselves and others, between ourselves and our world, or within ourselves. On the contrary, when we choose good over evil, love over selfishness, and others over ourselves, we tear down the walls and barriers and divisions and build bridges, a straight highway for our God. We do our part to make the kingdom of Christ a reality in our world.

My brothers and sisters, John the Baptist was the precursor, the one who came before Jesus to announce his coming. His words were the same words that would form the heart of Jesus' message: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" Repentance in the Gospels represents a change of heart and a change of life. During our lives, all of us have probably built some tall walls between ourselves and others. Repentance this Advent might mean that we take the initiative either to tear them down or to build bridges over them. During this Advent season, this might be the best way for us to welcome Christ into our lives and hearts today.