

## **Second Sunday of Advent (A) Remembering, Pondering, and Praying!**

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Justice shall flourish in his time and fullness of peace forever. This psalm points to God's promise fulfilled in Jesus, which the people of old can only hope for, and anticipates the mysterious workings of God in our times that compels us to remember, ponder, and pray!

Do you remember the time that God saved you? We all have the unique experience of being saved by our Lord. How about being spared from disaster or accident, or passing through sleep unharmed and waking up all right? Or how about having overwhelming debt, a house mortgage, or addictions? I often heard people say, "I can't believe I was able to survive that painful moment of my life! I don't know how I was able to pull myself out of that trouble. It was turbulent during our flight; however, we landed at the airport safely. I can't imagine how I came out from that serious illness. I was unlikely to pass the exam, but I did it. Had I not listened to my parents, I would not accomplish what I have today.

Discernibly, what I heard are moments of grace, God-experience moments, or better still, God's revelation. If we are able to thrive in life, accomplish something, and experience peace, isn't it because of God's grace? I think it is compelling to say that God is Immanuel. He is with us in all those moments. Often, he makes things happen that seem impossible to us. God lives with us; he saves; he is our peace! Humbly remembering in prayer those past distressing or chaotic moments helps us ponder the present realities of our lives that often lead us to be thankful and even confident. Isn't it? Remembering allows our memory to be part of the past to treasure, pondering helps draw insights and lessons for the present, and praying elevates our remembering and pondering to the awareness of God, who never withdraws his presence in our lives. We do this so that we may not forget the bigger picture of what God desires to give us.

The stories and situations we heard from the Bible reading this Sunday speak about difficult circumstances, yet something promising, beautiful, and unthinkable happened. They tell us the mysterious workings of God, which invite us to remember, ponder, and pray that we may not forget what God is preparing for us! There is always a bigger picture. He wants to give us more. He desires to give himself to us!

In our first reading, Prophet Isaiah, amid the turmoil of the Davidic dynasty, where kings became corrupt and notoriously weak-willed, prophesied, "A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and his roots, a bud shall blossom" (Is 11:1). What a powerful image! Against the backdraft of the decadence of the northern kingdom where only two kings emerged noble since the time of David — Hezekiah and Josiah but died young— he made the prophecy that new life will come from the dead stem and will bring salvation to all! He tells the people that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and will be filled with the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the LORD, which the previous kings lacked (cf. Is 11:2-3). Who would not dream of what Isaiah proclaimed? The hope for peace was born amid turmoil because of this promise.

Similarly, it would be inconceivable that Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled because one claimed to be favored by God, and the latter were considered outsiders. St. Paul was convinced that both needed the mercy of God (cf Rom 15:7-9). He believed that all people are saved through faith in Jesus, not because they happened to be Jews by birth and not just good works and following the Torah. However, because of his belief, he was ostracized by his Jewish friends, who considered him a traitor. One of the great ironies of faith is that the Gentiles heard the message of the Gospel and rejoiced in coming to faith, while those who should have been the first to believe (the Jews) rejected Jesus. We might say that this irony is fulfilled by what our Lord Jesus had said: The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. These great ironies of God's saving action remind us that God can and will save us and our times – he graces us with the gift of reconciliation and unity through our Lord Jesus.

St. John the Baptist, in our Gospel reading, challenges us to remember, ponder and pray for the offer of God's saving actions! His message is direct: "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt 3:2). He denounced

the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance" (Matt 3:7-8). This is not the message we find on commercial Christmas cards or television at this time of the year. But St. John the Baptist's message is essential. Like St. Paul, he poignantly warns that no one will be saved because they "belong" to the right group. If a person doesn't repent and doesn't bring forth fruits of righteousness, he/she will be like chaff burned with unquenchable fire. God fulfilled the fiery words of John the Baptist in a very unexpected and unlikely manner: John looked for a decisive judgment with the Messiah destroying sinners by fire, yet Jesus conquered sin and saved the sinners by his death.

The short and yet profound action during the "Fraction Rite," the breaking of the Sacred Host while singing the Agnus Dei, reminds us that Christ's body is broken for us so that when we receive Holy Communion, we may be one, united in Christ (cf 1 Cor. 10:17). And when the priest elevates Jesus' Body and Blood and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," it ushers our minds to the Passover event when the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites during their liberation from Egypt. Now, it is Jesus' blood, the Lamb of God, which saves us, and the giver of true peace! It reminds us, therefore, that we cannot know the true gift of peace and joy of Christmas if we don't feel the need for a Savior!

If only we spend time to remember, ponder, and pray!

God bless you.

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