

2nd Sunday in Advent
12/4/16

Fr. Joe Robinson offered the following prayer a few years ago for those who might be standing in line at the Post Office, waiting to send cards or packages to family and friends. It goes like this: “God, our Father, may everything we do be first-class. Imprint your own loving zip code upon our hearts so that we may never go astray. Provide in your gracious Providence special handling for those of us who are fragile and keep us in one piece. And when our days draw to a close and we are marked ‘Return to Sender,’ be there to greet us at Heaven’s door so that no one there might say ‘Unknown at this address.’ Amen.”

Advent is a time of contrasts, a time of both/and, a time of promises and warnings. We are told to prepare ourselves for the coming of a Savior, the promise of the Messiah finally being fulfilled. But we are also warned to prepare by fulfilling the words of Isaiah the prophet, who tells us about wolves being guests of lambs, about leopards lying down with kids, calves and young lions browsing together, with a child to guide them. Babies will play by the cobra’s den and the child will lay his head on the adder’s lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on Isaiah’s holy mountain.

This sounds like the stuff of dreams, of utopia, of pie-in-the-sky musings. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Is it so unrealistic to think that the world we live in could be a world where people get along with each other? Shortly after the attacks of September 11th, Glenn Rudolph was commissioned to compose a piece in memory of those who lost their lives that fateful day. It’s called *The Dream Isaiah Saw*, and the lyrics go like this.

Lions and oxen will sleep in the hay, leopards will join with the lambs as they play, wolves will be pastured with cows in the glade, blood will not darken the earth that God made. Little child whose bed is straw, take new lodgings in my heart. Bring the dream Isaiah saw: life redeemed from fang and claw. Peace will pervade more than forest and field: God will transfigure the Violence concealed deep in the

heart and in systems of gain, ripe for the judgement the Lord will ordain. Little child whose bed is straw, take new lodgings in my heart. Bring the dream Isaiah saw: justice purifying law. Nature reordered to match God's intent, nations obeying the call to repent, all of creation completely restored, filled with the knowledge and love of the Lord.

Little child whose bed is straw, take new lodgings in my heart. Once again it sounds like a fantasy world but it doesn't have to be. If the little Child Jesus lives in our hearts, Isaiah's world won't be a dream but a reality: a living, breathing, visionary reality. Advent is meant to prepare us for that reality but it won't happen unless we're part of it. We must be prepared to welcome not just the Christ Child but all those we encounter: the poor and the meek, the marginalized and the outcasts. Rudolph says that if Isaiah's dream is in our hearts, life will be redeemed from fang and claw, justice will purify law, filled with knowledge, wisdom, worship and awe.

Mary McGlone says it this way: if we really want to appreciate Isaiah's promise, Isaiah's dream, we need to step out of our own loafers and imagine walking in the sandals of people who have nothing but hope. It is for such as these that the promised Messiah was to come. The question we must ask is whether we can share their hopes for the coming of God's justice. If we can, we'll receive their reward with them.

Allow me to repeat the prayer I began with: "God, our Father, may everything we do be first-class. Imprint your own loving zip code upon our hearts so that we may never go astray. Provide in your gracious Providence special handling for those of us who are fragile and keep us in one piece. And when our days draw to a close and we are marked 'Return to Sender,' be there to greet us at Heaven's door so that no one there might say 'Unknown at this address.' Amen."