

December 8, 2013 -- Second Sunday of Advent
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Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3: 1-12

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. -- Psalm 72

Is there any image more full of hope than a shoot arising from old stump? Advent Liturgy tells us once again that God has never forgotten humankind. It invites the sore of heart to rekindle hope.

Isaiah tells his listeners that in good time a spurt of life will issue from that old stump of Jesse. Not only that, but that this shoot will be enhanced with growth into wisdom; will be the real thing; will be endowed with discretion, authority, and on his own authority not hesitant about speaking justice to the wicked and the innocent ... nor shy about expressing tenderness to the young and untried.

The responsorial psalm reiterates this message. In addition, it adds to God's fidelity that of God's endless and expansive goodwill. And if this is not enough, the extent of God's loving-kindness reaches right down to the lowliest poor one who thought there was no one who cared. No wonder we are invited to sing this hymn of praise to God for such faithfulness to us.

The letter to the Romans continues urging us to be patient and hopeful. We catch again the image of the lion lying down with the lamb. Harmony is with one another is urged. In fact this is the how-to, our clue – to get along we need to accept one another. This ensures that we be part of the solution, that is, by living well with our neighbors.

In Matthew 3:1-12, the figure of John the Baptizer brings us up short: he does not mince words when he addresses Pharisees and Sadducees. He says that one cannot rest on family ancestry. He tells them that each has the responsibility to respond lest the tree refuses to bear fruit, becomes dead and is severed and thrown into the fire.

As we bring this Gospel message forward to our own day, our own place, our own parish, I can think of two events taking place in my parish, hosted by our Community Advocacy Committee. One is an Urban Land Institute Plan to improve a stretch of Belair Road; the other, a parish Advent study, will talk about housing problems among our neighbors. What will these have to do with today's scripture readings? One event deals with pedestrian safety, traffic enhancement, environmental betterment and aesthetic improvement, all in that order. At a recent meeting hosted by our committee the Baltimore City Department of Transportation presenters welcomed opinions from neighbors and parishioners who use Old Belair Road, a segment of U.S. Route One. We are promised reports and further meetings. And we have hope.

The other event will be directed by United Workers, a union with a social education segment with which our parish has participated in City Hall demonstrations on occasion. This time our Advocacy Committee will host the meeting at our parish church after Sunday liturgy. The group will present a video of an experiment for ending homelessness carried out in Roxbury, MA. It will deal with the need for affordable, safe, adequate housing, and how a neighborhood in Roxbury went about finding solutions. In Baltimore City we face a problem common to many old cities: areas of dilapidated houses coexist with the urgent needs of the homeless. In the Speak Out portion of the meeting we hope to learn who among

us know homeless persons, which neighborhoods are involved, and how we might take steps to solve the problem.

Can we have hope for the outcomes of this meeting, also? Both of these events will involve persons who know what it is to live the daily problems in a city. No doubt about it, the first meeting holds more promise for immediate follow through. The Speak Out, on the other hand, may cause us much discomfort as we learn who are the homeless among us. Once the fact of a homeless population is verified, the decisions about what to do will be challenging. There is hope that both of these meeting have relevance to that day when “a shoot shall come out from the stump...” promised in the prophet Isaiah’s words.

Our prayer for this Advent Season is that when we start with hope and continue in patience, God will take over and bless these efforts. For the politician and the worker and the justice-seeker and the poor one to come together will be miracle enough. To bring about understanding and the will to work together will be another miracle.

All of this starts with those heart-melting words about the young shoot, and a bud that will blossom.

Come, Shoot of Jesse, come and help your people!

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