

Homily For Tuesday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass – July 14, 2020

Isaiah 7:1-9 "The heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as trees before the wind."

Psalm 48:1-8 "Within the citadels of Zion, God has shown himself a sure defense."

Matt 11:20-24 "On the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for you (Capernaum)."

A Tale of Many Cities

Introduction

Charles Dickens begins his novel, A Tale of Two Cities, with the famous line: "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness. It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

Today's passages are about the destiny of multiple cities and kingdoms during their worst of times. Surely it is a time to wonder about our cities. Is this what it looks like, a winter of despair, or do we dare anticipate a new spring of hope?

Isaiah

The situation in Isaiah's time was certainly the worst of times for Judah, the southern kingdom. The great city of Jerusalem, God's holy city, was under siege. Neighbouring Syria was a dangerous enemy. Even God's own people in the northern kingdom, called Israel, were attacking.

Judah had been barely successful at fending off this double threat. But now King Ahaz hears that those two have just formed an alliance to attack him. This should really be no problem for a king in the line of David. But it is a problem. Why? Because King Ahaz has long stopped trusting in God, and has led people into abandoning worship of God in favour of the useless gods of the nations.

And so, the heart of Ahaz, and the heart of his people, shook. They were terrified.

Isaiah comes from God with words of hope but also of **warning**. Ahaz, Isaiah tells him, this could be the best of times. This is your opportunity to build your safety on God's help. You don't need to worry about the pagan nation of Aram. They will

fail. You do not even have to worry about Ephraim, the northern kingdom. They have already abandoned God and will be destroyed because of it.

What's Isaiah's message in that time of great crisis? Even when your enemies have joined forces against you: Be calm. Do not fear. Only trust in the Lord. Ah, but there is a warning: If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.

Matthew

The situation in Jesus' time also looks a lot like the worst of times. The people of Judah are conquered and occupied by a pagan nation. But the cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin have right in front of them the ultimate heir to the throne of David, Jesus himself. They have the power and might of God right in front of them. They see his authority over sickness and death, over the forces of nature, and even over the demonic forces.

The city of Capernaum is where Jesus lived. He taught in their synagogue and did many miracles and signs there. They had every reason to trust that it was a springtime of hope.

Jesus gives them a warning that should make them shake like a leaf in the wind, like Ahaz of old. Do you think you are going to be raised up because you are God's chosen people? No. Why? Because you have seen the works of God but you do not repent. What does it mean to repent? it means to turn back to God. It is what Ahaz would not do. If the pagan cities Tyre and Sidon had seen what you do, they would have repented.

This is not just a warning. It is an outright condemnation: On the day of judgment, even Sodom is going to get off more easily than you, who saw the works of God, but they did not repent.

Call To Action

What's the situation for us? It certainly does not look like the best of times. You are living it, so you don't need me to tell you. But doesn't it feel like the enemies of a safe and secure life have joined forces against goodness itself. But that is not our problem. We have a much more serious issue at hand.

If Christ is truly present among us: in his Word, in his Eucharist, and in his Church, then we are in a situation much like that of ancient Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum as they witnessed his ministry.

We are heirs to the greatest gift of all, the fullness of the presence of Jesus Christ, not just to the few cities he would be able to access on foot. Jesus has entrusted the Church with the fullness of Christian truth and grace. Have we responded to these privileges with faith and zeal proportionate to their greatness?

We must not count on the greatness of our cities, our civilizations, to save us from judgment. It is repentance alone that will save us. The people of Calgary must turn to God or we will suffer judgment. We must find areas in our lives that are not fully surrendered to the lordship of Jesus. To us much has been given and so much will be required.

We must hear Isaiah say: You will not stand firm unless your faith is firm. The Hebrew word for trust is the root word for faith, Amen, which means 'I believe'.

We must hear Jesus ask of us who live in today's cities: Did you see the works of God and not repent? The best of times are within our power, but only through repentance and trust in God. Let us not miss this moment. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall not fear, because God is with us.