

Homily for July 17, 2020

Friday 16th Week of ordinary Time

Sickness is common to all people, the commoner as well as the king. No one gets out of this life without experiencing some pain and suffering. Although some people will die suddenly in accidents, many others will experience a terminal illness. In our reading from Isaiah we are told of King Hezekiah, who experiences a life-threatening illness. Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he ascended the throne and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem, according to 2 Chronicles 29:1. So, he would have been fifty-four years old at the time of his death. Since the Lord added fifteen years to Hezekiah's life after this disease, he would have been thirty-nine years old, in the prime of his life, when he encountered this serious malady.

Now, not only did Hezekiah have to deal with this illness he was King of Judah from 727-698 BC, a time of great political turmoil for the Middle East. (It seems that this is always the case for the Fertile Crescent). Hezekiah also had to contend with the military advances of the Assyrians, who were the dominant world power in those years. For much of his reign Hezekiah was a vassal ruler who while he was enthroned in Jerusalem was dictated to by the Assyrian power.

However, in the same year as his illness, his fourteenth year as king, in 713, Hezekiah received the Babylonian delegation of Merodach-baladan (2 Kings 18:13; 20:12–13) and this diplomatic dealing with the sworn enemy of the Assyrians did not please the Assyrians. We know from an inscription of the Assyrian King, Sennacherib that in retaliation:

***'As for Hezekiah of Judah, who did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity and conquered them.... I drove out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle, beyond counting and considered them booty.'*¹**

But as Isaiah had prophesied by reference to the sundial (which was actually a staircase) that Hezekiah's father had built, (Ahaz was his name), the sun's shadow would fall to the west and not to the east of the staircase as it set at the end of the day. This was a sign that the city of Jerusalem would not be laid siege too and overcome.

What is the significance of all this? That despite all the challenges and hardships Hezekiah faced in this year of personal and national crisis he was a man a deep and trusting prayer. Unlike his father who turned away from the Lord in difficulty, Hezekiah, we are told cried out to the Lord and prayed:

¹ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [Harper's Bible dictionary](#) (1st ed., p. 390). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Remember now, O LORD, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.²

The same attitude is expressed in the responsorial canticle for today, also taken from Isaiah 38. Knowing what you now do about Hezekiah listen to his prayer again:

I said: In the noontide of my days
I must depart.
I am consigned to the gates of Sheol
for the rest of my years.
¹¹I said, I shall not see the LORD
in the land of the living.
I shall look upon mortals no more
among the inhabitants of the world.
¹²My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me
like a shepherd's tent.
like a weaver I have rolled up my life.
he cuts me off from the loom.
from day to night you bring me to an end.
O Lord, by these things people live,
and in all these is the life of my spirit.
Oh, restore me to health and make me live!

Hezekiah was restored to health but for the next 15 years would continue to face economic and political crisis because of the Assyrian threat, that would follow him to his death at 54 in the year 698 BC.

Hezekiah can be an inspiration who reminds us that amidst of the challenges and difficulties we face in our lives that our personal and national, we are to look to the even greater sign than the shadow of the sun. We look to Jesus the one who is greater than the Temple and is the Lord of the Sabbath as the one who leads us to live merciful and godly lives in a world like this.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 38:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.