

Homily For Friday of the Third Week of Advent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Dec 17, 2022

Genesis 49:2,8-10 "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until the obedience of the peoples is his ."

Psalms 72: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son."

Matthew 1:1-17 "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham."

The Story Tells It All

Introduction

Every year, I learn something new about the meaning of the Advent journey. December 17 is a transition point. You know that a novena is nine days of prayers. That's a devotion. The liturgical year tends to identify octaves of days. That's eight days. So on this date, we begin the octave of days in final preparation for the birth of Jesus. Today's readings provide some amazing details about Advent. The Church invites us to enter into the longing of Israel for the coming of the Saviour, and so increase the longing in our hearts to welcome that same Saviour.

Genesis

Today we go way back. Genesis provides a very early prophecy of the Messiah. Jacob is giving final wisdom to his sons before his own death. Jacob says to Judah, his fourth son, that his line will hold the sceptre of power. There are no kings of Israel yet, but the future royal line will come out of Judah, not the oldest. Then it gets more intense when he says, "Your brothers shall praise you." The Hebrew word used there means 'thanksgiving'. The descendants of your brothers will 'give thanks' for you. But this is actually a sacred word meaning the thanksgiving that is given to God alone. That's very strange and does not make sense unless the one who alone deserves that kind of thanksgiving is born of the line of Judah.

Matthew

The New Testament passage that best encapsulates the spirit of Advent and the ancient Jewish longing for the messiah is the genealogy of Jesus. It sums up the hopes and fears of all the years. The Church uses this genealogy for the gospel

reading at mass every December 17, setting the tone for the octave leading up to Christmas. Reading other people's genealogies is about as exciting as watching their holiday videos. But for the ancient Jews each name told a story and recalled key events in salvation history. By tracing Jesus' lineage, Matthew announces that Israel's story is reaching its climax in the child, establish Jesus as the Messiah. He is the Son of Abraham and so belongs to the chosen people. He is the son of David, the righteous brand that will bless all nations and usher in an everlasting kingdom. The genealogy is more important than a simple historical.

The opening phrase begins with the same phrase as the account of creation in Genesis 2:4: "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created." So Jesus will now be associated in this way to creation itself. In fact, he will inaugurate a kind of new creation.

Even in this brief survey of the genealogy, we must not leave out a very significant aspect, which is the inclusion of four women. The women named are not the ones who would immediately come to mind as great figures from Israel's past.

Each has an unusual twist to her story. Tamar is the only woman in the Hebrew Scriptures who is called righteous, a term that is of central importance to Matthew. Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho sheltered spies sent from Joshua. Ruth was a foreigner who united herself to Israel gave birth to Obed, the grandfather of King David. Finally the wife of Uriah is Bathsheba, the one who bore David's son Solomon. Each story speaks of how women took bold actions to enable God's purposes to be brought to fruition in unexpected ways. Their stories prepare for the extraordinary circumstances of Jesus' birth and the salvation he will ultimately extend to those outside Israel.

The women are all non Jews. They are the ones who represent God's love for Gentiles, for the rest of the world. They are the ones who make a highway for God to bless the whole world, by their fertility. It's not a popular thing today to emphasize the great gift of fertility which women have by their particular participation in human nature, but God makes it so. These women lay the

foundation for the future universal mission of Jesus' kingdom and, of course, for the role of the greatest woman of all, Mary the mother of the Lord.

One more point for today: The story of the announcement to Joseph serves as an explanation for this last link of the genealogy. It shows how Jesus was conceived in Mary not by natural means, but by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, the bearer of Davidic ancestry, appears not as the father of Jesus, but as the husband of Mary. Pope Benedict says that, through Joseph, Jesus does truly belong to the house of David And yet Jesus comes from elsewhere, 'from above' Only God is truly his 'father'." But here, the focus shifts to Mary. Of her was born Jesus, who is called the Messiah." Isn't that remarkable? The entire genealogy provides hints that the women have a role. Then, quite suddenly, we see that it is the most significant immediate role. Another great woman, Elizabeth, calls Mary "The mother of my Lord."

Call To Conversion

Jesus' genealogy helps us contemplate the mystery that we are about to celebrate: that God became Man, true Man, and "and made his dwelling among us." St. Leo the Great says that "there is no sense calling him a man if he doesn't have a genealogy.

We have the privilege of calling on the name of the Lord. His name is the only one that contains the presence it signifies. Whoever invokes the name of Jesus is welcoming the Son of God. St. Paul says that "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We begin this octave before Christmas contemplating how beautiful and wonderful is God's plan, which was so from the beginning, was made real through natural men and women, and longs to be born again and again in men and women in this time and in this place, in my heart and yours. Let us give thanks to the Lord for his great love is without end. Amen.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Rejoice, O heavens, and exult, O earth, for our Lord will come to show mercy to his poor.*

Collect: *O God, look with favour on our prayers, that your only begotten Son may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity.*

Genesis: *Jacob called his sons and said, "O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father ... Judah, your brothers shall praise you. Your father's sons shall bow down before you. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the obedience of the peoples is his."*

Psalms: *Justice and peace shall flourish forever. Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. May he defend the cause of the poor. May his name endure forever as long as the sun.*

Matthew: *An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers; Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar ... Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah ... And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah the father of Salathiel ... Matthan the father of Jacob ... the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to the Messiah, fourteen generations.*