

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Dec 18, 2018

Jeremiah 23: 5-8 "I will raise up for David a righteous branch."

Psalms 72 "Justice shall flourish ... and fullness of peace forever."

Luke 10: 21-24 "Jesus was born of Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, son of Mary."

Introduction

Day two of the final countdown to the coming of the Messiah. Beginning with December 17, yesterday, there is an urgency about our prayer. It is reflected in the Liturgy of the Hours. Before December 17, the opening antiphon is "Come let us worship the Lord, the king who is to come. After December 17 it becomes "The Lord is close at hand. Come let us worship him." He is so close, we can worship his nearness.

Today's readings have us securely on the train tracks, not just in the third week of Advent, but December 18, exactly seven days before Christmas. The Prophet Jeremiah declares: "I will raise up for David a righteous branch." The Psalmist pleads: "O God, give your righteousness to a king's son." And Matthew explains: "Mary's betrothed husband, Joseph, was a righteous man."

Jeremiah

Righteousness can be a complex concept in the Bible. But the scriptures today give us some insight into the heart of the meaning of righteousness. In Jeremiah, it literally means that there will be a legitimate continuation of the kingdom of David's royal line, a branch from the same tree. That's important because it fulfills God's promise of faithfulness.

But no one ever gets just how perfectly God is the promise keeping God. That's because God's nature is of a different order of magnitude than ours. There are signs. There are indications. But the human psyche can't grasp just to what degree God will be faithful. It's not just a 'new and improved' David that is being foretold. It is ultimately one who will be, not just "a man after God's own heart." He will BE that heart and presence of God. The Messiah wasn't just going to be a new king like David. He would be the perfection of David's kingship.

Jeremiah gives us this great line "This is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" We know that in Hebrew understanding, a name says something about a person's identity. It's not just a means for calling someone to supper. A name says something about the person. That is why God's answer to Moses at the burning bush about His name is: I am the God who is. I am existence itself. That's his name. Here, the one who is to come has the

name that tells us who he is. His name and his being are the same. He IS perfect righteousness and holiness and truth.

Gospel

Today's Gospel passage follows immediately from the opening verses of Matthew's Gospel yesterday, those wonderfully exciting 'begats', which show the path of God's saving action from Abraham, through the kings of Israel, down to the king of kings, Jesus Christ. And who is mentioned in that lineup, just before the Messiah? "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah." The righteous branch of David has borne fruit.

Joseph will manifest the righteousness of God. How does he do this? By how he acts, of course. He acts with righteous obedience, not with words. Joseph acts in his silence. We often use the fact that there are no words of Joseph's in our bible as a cause for lament. Too bad Mathew or Mark or Luke didn't capture some great thing that Joseph said so we could latch on to it.

But, here is the lesson for us about Sacred Scripture. It is human writing but divinely inspired through and through. It is not an accident or an omission or because he is mute that Joseph doesn't speak. Something profound is being expressed in his silence obedience. This is the nature of his righteousness.

Joseph is the final righteous sign pointing to "THE righteous one", the one who IS righteousness itself. The Messiah is perfect holiness, perfect mercy and justice, perfect love, perfect fulfillment of the covenant promises of God's full and eternal presence.

Call To Action

We live between two realities. Or, perhaps better, we live in two realities: The already and the not yet; The past and the future combined in a present filled with anticipation and excitement. Jesus has already come for the world and for us, but only if we make the decision to receive the gift we are being offered. That means, in our time and place, there is a manifestation of the coming of Christ into the world which has not happened yet, because it depends on us, and cannot occur without our assent, our agreement, our willingness to cooperate with righteousness. That is our YES.

Our task today should be to take some quiet reflection time, in silence, to consider the God of righteousness. How will we be obedient today? We are used to acknowledging Mary's YES, her Fiat or statement of faith "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word." How will we say yes to God today? Can we hear God saying to us "Do not be afraid to act righteously" What fear can we let go of, what act of obedience can we make, so that we might be free to pray: The Lord of righteousness is close at hand. Come let us worship him.