

Nov. 29, 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 64:1–9

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence — as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil — to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
But now, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.
Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.

Gospel Reading: Mark 11:1-10

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus^[a] sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

What is Palm Sunday doing here at the beginning of Advent? The triumphal entry of Jesus to his people. A king coming to his people. Humble and riding on a donkey, representing peace, not war. Comfort and love, not merely victory and power. The people cry "Hosanna to the Son of David (Save us, your majesty)." From the prophetic words of Elijah... Prepare! Make ready! Clear a road. Fill in the ditches, cut down the mountains... Make way for the Prince of Peace.

Of course this is appropriate for Advent... the cry of the Prophet in the wilderness... Make WAY! Prepare. After all, what is the purpose of Advent? A time of preparation. A time to reorganize our priorities. Make ready in all the ways that we might for the ARRIVAL of the Christ. Yes, the infant Jesus, the Son of God incarnate. Sadly, for too many Christians they never grow up in their faith and the only Jesus they are willing to receive is the Baby Jesus.

But here today we begin the festival season in PREPARATION... in ADVENT. The image I most enjoy is that from the Disney movie "Aladdin." (You may remember the story of Aladdin, finding the magic lamp and using one of his three wishes to become Prince Ali, in order to woo the princess. The scene in which "Prince Ali" enters the town in a huge parade is the Advent scene I have in mind.) I don't know if Elton John was intentional in his song writing, but he captured the moment using the words and symbols associated with a Christian idea of Advent. The one thing that he left out of his imagery was *humility*. True, Aladdin was of humble birth but Ali was a genuine prince. And Aladdin as the pretender makes us a show in the extravagance of his entrance, as would any earthly king make a show. You see in the parade that even the enemy can't stop the advent; the gates give way to him. Like Jesus, he's a bridegroom who has come for his bride.

But in our reading today, Jesus does not come to his people in this manner. Although, given who Jesus is, the celebration and the palm branches are appropriate. As Jesus will say "If the people were to remain silent the very stones would cry out."

Jesus doesn't say this to boast. It's the truth. And humility is what we are looking at. Not a king of glory and power. Although he is that too and when he comes again into this world, that power and glory will be on full display. No, this time... He enters as a KING for sure... But a different kind of king. A savior. A healer. A servant. In PEACE... to comfort his people. To redeem them. Gentle. A man of sorrows. Humble and not filled with pride.

Humility has been called the greatest human virtue. The mother of all other virtues. It is NOT self-seeking. It does not call attention to itself. And, therefore, it's not often a virtue that we value highly in our leader in part, I suppose, because we conflate humility with weakness. But as I have often said... meekness is NOT weakness. Meekness is POWER under restraint. Humility

is supreme confidence in who you are without the need to prove yourself to others. A humble person does not value themselves more highly than others and therefore can act out in surprising and even heroic ways. If being meek is holding POWER in check then perhaps we could say that being humble is the ability to hold authority in check, anger in check, and justice in check, in order to be merciful in the heat of conflict. There is a time for mercy and grace. And there is perhaps no opportunity for them if there is no call to self-restraint and humility.

What we are witnessing here, at the start of Advent, is the call to prepare our hearts, our minds and our lives for the coming of our Savior, our King who loves his people and so comes to us gently, without threats. The second advent, the Day of Judgement, *is* coming. We will see the King of Glory. But for now...we have the Prince of Peace to worship and pray to and he comes with healing for his people, and comfort. This is the hope of the Advent season... strength and compassion. This is our light in the night sky that heralds the approach of the dawn.

Amen