

2nd Sunday of Advent (December 8th, 2019)

Isaiah 11:1-10 *This prophet has repeatedly taught that new life in Judah would bud only after a general devastation of the nation.⁴ Today's reading is addressed to the nation when they no longer have a king on the throne of David and the people are scattered to the four corners of the earth.*

1On that day, This prophecy about the Ideal King was fulfilled when Jesus, the Messiah came. **a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, Jesse was David's father. and from his roots a bud shall blossom.** After the Babylonian exile only a stump of the Davidic dynasty remains; but from it will arise the new shoot, the messianic King.

2The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, The coming ruler is said to be imbued with the spirit of the Lord which is described with three sets of qualities: two powers of the intellect, two practical abilities and two gifts of piety. The repetition of "the fear of the Lord" led the Greek and Latin versions to translate one as "piety" thus giving us seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹ This is the source of the traditional names of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.²

3and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord.

4Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. This means that he will chasten them. Consider Ephesians 6, which describes the Word of God as the "Sword of the Spirit."

5Justice shall be the band around his waist, Justice and faithfulness will be as close to him as a loincloth.¹ (as close as his underwear!) **and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.** The new king is going to be characterized by all the strengths and skills mentioned in Proverbs and in the legends about Solomon. These qualities are common to what is desired of a king in all cultures but "the fear of the Lord" is distinctly Israelite.³

6Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. This may refer to restoration of peace between man and nature but more likely, since wolves usually refer to fierceness and oppression and the lamb is a symbol of helplessness, this means that the mighty will live peacefully with the weak.³ The image in this verse suggests that the Messianic era will be a paradise restored.⁶

7The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. This is about a new age in which old enmities will be forgotten and those who exploit the poor and needy will change their habits.³

8The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. The vulnerable will be immune from danger.³

9There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; There will be no more ill-treatment or corruption in Zion. **for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea.** This is a vision of a world characterized by justice, righteousness and peace, a world ruled by an ideal king, the Messiah, son of David, and a world in which the people (not the animals) shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."³

10On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious. Isaiah speaks here of a day when this ideal leader will be sought out by all nations, even the "Gentiles." And his "glorious" dwelling will be the hearts of all those who seek him.⁵

Romans 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

⁴Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. The Scriptures of Israel (OT) remain essential to the life and liturgy of the Church as they are filled with wisdom for Christian living.⁷ Both the Old and the New Testament have God as their author. There is a consistency because of this. The Old Testament prophesies and prefigures while the New Testament fulfills the Old.⁸ Here begins a prayer (5 and 6) that shows the two basic movements of prayer in the encounter between God and man. God gives the gift which man accepts and uses to glorify God.⁸

⁵May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus,

⁶that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, Some translations say “accept one another” for Paul is referring here to the tension between Jews and Gentiles and his appeal for their unity.⁶ then, as Christ welcomed you, Jesus is the model for Paul’s exhortations.⁷ for the glory of God. THIS IS THE MOTIVE BEHIND ALL OF CHRIST’S REDEMPTIVE ACTIVITY!⁶

⁸For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised Jesus mainly confined his ministry to the people of Israel.⁷ to show God’s truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, Jesus had to be a Jew and minister to the Jews, in order to confirm God’s promises to the patriarchs.⁶ The promise was given to the Jews so that they would take it to the Gentiles in the hope that all would come to glorify God. The Gentiles were included in the Old Testament promises in the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms.⁶

⁹but so that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name. The Jews have cause to rejoice because God has been faithful to promises in their regard. The Gentiles have cause to rejoice because God has extended mercy and love to them in pure grace. Regardless, then, of differences between Jew and Gentile, neither has cause to look down upon the other.⁹

Matthew 3:1-12

¹John the Baptist This forerunner to the Messiah was a Levite and relative of Jesus born just six months before him. John was considered a prophet by Jesus as well as many of the Jews and the Church honors him as the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New Testament Saints. His message was accompanied by an austere life of penance and self-denial. John’s clothing recalls the OT prophet Elijah who “wore a garment of haircloth, with a belt of leather about his loins.” A figure like Elijah was expected to return before the Messiah to begin restoring the tribes of Israel.¹¹ He is the only saint, except the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose birthday is observed as a feast.¹⁰ appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying,

²“Repent, The biblical idea of repentance involves a willingness to turn one’s life around in the sense of a complete reorientation.² for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” “Kingdom” is used more than 50 times in Matthew. It is closely related to God’s covenant oath to establish David’s royal kingdom. John announces the spiritual restoration of David’s empire by Jesus the Messiah. While the phrase “kingdom of God” occasionally appears (4 times), “kingdom of heaven” (32 times) is the dominant theme in Matthew for two reasons: 1. it undercuts the political and military expectations surrounding the Messiah as many Jews hoped only for an earthly kingdom, and 2. while Christ’s kingdom begins on earth, it will reach its full perfection in heaven.¹¹

³It was of him (John) that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: a voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, (Jesus) make straight his paths. The words of Isaiah outline John’s mission as the important figure who prepares the way of the Lord.

⁴John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts (grasshoppers) and wild honey.

⁵At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him ⁶and were being baptized by him John's baptism did not have the power to forgive sin. This was a symbolic action signifying that conversion of heart had taken place.¹² **in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.** This river, which runs along the eastern side of Palestine, is like a giant barbell as it connects the Sea of Galilee in the north with the Dead Sea in the south. In the OT, the Jordan is associated with God's deliverance. Like the Red sea, it parted so that the Israelites could cross over on dry ground and inherit the Promised Land. Naaman the Syrian was cleansed from leprosy at this location when he "dipped" seven times in the river at the command of Elisha. Both OT events prefigure the saving power of the sacrament of Baptism.¹¹

⁷**When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! John was equating poisonous snakes with evil people.¹⁴ Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"** John warned these two groups of Jews to reform their lives as a preparation for the decisive intervention of God, "the coming wrath."¹²

⁸**Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.** The people were warned not to imagine that the mere ritual of baptism would preserve them from God's wrath. Rather, they must do the good deeds that are appropriate to genuine repentance in view of the coming kingdom.¹⁴

⁹**And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'** John also warned them not to rely on their Jewish descent to protect themselves if they refused to do good works and be baptized.¹² **For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.**

¹⁰**Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit** In the coming time of judgment before the fullness of God's kingdom (heaven), it is the fruit of good deeds that will count. John's stress on repentance, action now, and bearing fruit in good deeds foreshadows Jesus' instruction to his own disciples.¹² **will be cut down and thrown into the fire.**

¹¹**I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals.** This was the work of the lowest of the servants. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."** John contrasts his own symbolic water-baptism with the immersion in the Holy Spirit and the fire which is God's action in totally wiping out sin.¹³

¹²**His winnowing fan is in his hand.** This was a long handled fork used by farmers to throw the shredded grain and straw into the air. The wind would then carry away the lighter chaff and the grain would fall back to the ground. The winnowed grain was stored in barns and the chaff was burned. **He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."** This is the traditional image of the last judgment as a harvest where the good "wheat" will be separated from the bad "chaff."¹² Blessed Escriva points out that "chaff" does not refer only to bad deeds; it also refers to useless ones, lives lacking in service to God and men. God will judge us, therefore, not just for the sins we have committed, but also for our omissions and our lost opportunities.¹³

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999" by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) "The New American Bible: St Joseph Edition," (3) "Isaiah" by John F.A. Sawyer, (4) "The Book of Isaiah" by M. McNamara, M.S.C., (5) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1990" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (6) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans," (8) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (9) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1995" by Aelred Rosser, (10) "1995 Catholic Almanac," (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew," (12) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (13) "The Navarre Bible: St Matthew," and (14) "Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who originally compiled these commentaries.