

SPIRITUAL LIFE

First Sunday of Advent

By: Fr. Mike Bayard S.J.

Even the darkness will not be dark to you, O lord.. The night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139:12)

After a long day of teaching at Red Cloud Indian School, I remember one winter late afternoon I made a trip to Rapid City along the back roads of rural South Dakota. Driving past the village lights of Oglala, I suddenly became aware of the darkness . . . pitch black.

If not for my headlights, or the rarity of a passing automobile or the porch light of houses—much like strung Christmas lights—across the prairie, the darkness would have entirely surrounded me.

Yet, one other light brightly rising on the northern horizon caught my eye. The North Star.

And, had I lost my way?

Looking upward, toward the darkened horizon, this single light would point in the right direction . . . toward my destination . . .

That light brought a sense that I was not alone . . . It brought an assurance . . . A consolation . . . A gratitude . . . A hope . . .

A similar light on another distant horizon . . . became an urgent longing of hope for a people who walked in darkness . . . whose lives were divided by the haves and have nots . . . at a time when the fear of political turmoil pervaded the land.

And, that one bright light on their horizon?

Pointed the way to the outskirts of Bethlehem to a small, dank manger . . . there in a stable, a child was found.

In the middle of the night, in silence, in an out of the way place, hope made its dwelling.

Are we wake to where hope makes its dwelling in our lives?

Friends—Advent does not just invite but it implores us to wake up . . . search . . . scan the horizon for a silver of assurance . . . a glimmer of hope.

And, I know, it is far too easy to become discouraged . . . cynical . . . bitter at the state of our lives . . . the world we live in. We live in dark times.

We live in a darkness that can reside in our minds and hearts—lost in a perpetual drabness in our daily comings and goings.

A darkness that pierces the heart of our nation—smeared . . . bleared with unjust policies, angry words toward nations, arms taken up in the heat of the moment.

A darkness that may surround our friendships or even our families—irreconcilable words and/or exploits that keep us from gathering . . . talking to one another . . . or even just saying, “I am sorry.” “I really do love you.”

A darkness that perforates each of our lives—unexpectedly . . . during a time when everything just seemed to be going fine . . . success . . . balance . . . good health . . . making ends meet.

A dark spirit can hold us hostage to all of this . . . to a belief that there is no hope in our world, that darkness will always pervade the particularities of our lives. That there is no way out.

Hearing Isaiah's words (vision) we can suppose he is just day-dreaming about what will never happen.

We can believe that if we think we are on our own.

And yet, there is a way out . . . today there is a way out . . . especially if each one of us commits to putting flesh on Isaiah's vision beginning right now.

Let us stay awake to the invitation of God's grace active and working in us to enable us to live out God's vision of peace . . . reconciliation for the world.

Taking Isaiah's vision let it stir us into action . . . so that we might as Paul compellingly urges,

“Throw off the world of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

Throw off weapons of violence [word & action] and put on the cloak of peace;

Get rid of hatred for one another [prejudice and judgment] and put on the mantle of love;

Divest ourselves of doubt and put on the shoes of faith;

Be free of sadness and put on the crown of joy.

All other ways lead down a dark alley to war and injustice, prejudice and division among peoples.

Let us heed Isaiah's Advent voice that invites us to turn to God. “Come let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Let us live—daily—preparing for the coming of the Prince of Peace.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

December 1, 2013

靈 修 生 活

將 臨 期 與 聖 誕 節

(一)「將臨期」是每年週而復始，開啟教會「禮儀年」的第一個季節，有四週的時間。「將臨期」像「禮儀年」中任何一個季節，都有一個重要的聖節為主軸，「將臨期」的重心當然是聖誕節。聖誕節的慶祝可以迴溯到第四世紀，但是，在第六世紀時，「將臨期」才漸漸形成，作為準備慶祝聖誕節的一個時段，而且具有了禮儀的性質。

(二)我們教會當前的「將臨期」的禮儀還保存了這雙重意義的特色：前兩週強調基督在末世光耀的來臨，及十二月十五日以後，則集中在基督誕生歷史的一面。這兩個階段的「聖道禮儀」很清楚地給我們提供豐富的資訊。

因此，「將臨期」並不是要紀念猶太民族漫長等待救主的史實，也不只是要預備善渡基督的誕辰。「將臨期」的意義在於強調：信友應意識到，基督誕生的歷史事實告訴我們：天主救贖工程正式啟動，而這救贖工程要在末世天主決定的時刻得到圓滿完成。這兩種來臨都是實際的，也是歷史性的，彼此密不可分，契合在一齊，不可以分割成「過去」或「未來」兩個截然分開的事件，而是一個待實現的過程。

(三)這個過程是—

在基督誕生與基督末世來臨之間，教會有她全部生命的開展，她不停地在慶祝天主聖子降生成人的奧蹟：基督來過、基督臨在、基督要來--基督恆常顯示祂是人類及宇宙的救主，籍著教會，即基督徒的生命共同體，基督以祂聖事性、恩寵性的臨在，基督並不給兩種來臨增加什麼，而是把兩者結合在一齊。對我們每個基督徒來說，我們也該在基督兩個來臨之間肖似基督，完成天主在我們每個人生命中預定的計劃，宣揚基督的福音，實踐基督的服務精神，建立起天主兒女的大家庭。而我們離開這個世界的時刻，也就是決定基督在末世來臨時，我們永恆的命運的時刻。

(四)主要來！我們要迎接祂！我們不應該擔心，我們孤苦無助：我們有依撒意亞預告，有若翰洗者指出除免世罪的羔羊，我們有聖母瑪利亞她接受聖佳播天使的報喜，馴服謙遜地懷了基督，她去為同樣奇妙地老來生子的表親服務，她們兩人的兒子都為救世工程有著密切的關係，而且是某種程度的合作者。

「主！請來！我們歡迎祢！」教會自初期就發出這類渴慕的呼聲，尤其在「將臨期」，我們該認真把這呼聲拿來運用，為表達出我們個人和我們團體的需要！「將臨期」的意義就在此！

(五)這是「期待」與「希望」的時刻！

這是「聆聽」與「省思」的時刻！

主「正義與和平的國」已經建立，建立在人而天主的基督身上，祂就是「道路、真理、生命」，祂就是天父具體、親切的大愛！是「將臨期」的最好努力內涵！

十二月八日我們慶祝「聖母始胎無玷」，要我們清楚意識到，基督救贖工程開始之前，已經產生了聖神不可思議的實效。天主在祂聖子成人必需有的母親--瑪利亞身上成就的美妙大事，聖母在她受孕之始已得救贖，不但未染原罪，而且滿被聖寵，一生只是一個攀登聖德巔峰的過程，因而成為我們所有人獲致救恩止於至善的楷模，也給我們在「將臨期」行動的方向和力量！

(六)「聖誕節」的慶祝不可只偏重基督降生人性溫馨、感人的一面，也應該重視這慶節神學的一面。

天主聖子由童貞聖母降生成人，是天主救贖人類大工程的開始和基礎。另一方面人從此可以分享天主性，人性因而得以提昇，人從此可以進入天主內，神化。聖誕節的慶祝應幫助我們建立起這不可或間的意識，而且使兩方面得到平衡及和諧。

(七)從天主聖子降生成人的奧蹟作為中心，我們教會的禮儀發展出一系列節日，使我們能夠更容易，更妥貼地深入到基督要救一切人、要聖化一切，也要用各種方式，使我們無論作為個人，或作為團體得救的完美計劃中；「主顯節」昭示一切人蒙召得救；約旦河受洗是天主肯定基督乃天主子；「聖家節」及割損紀念日則強調基督的人性及家庭的神聖與重要；在聖誕節後第八天慶祝聖母為天主之母，指出聖母與基督在救贖工程上之不可分；在在都顯示教會極其重視的是聖子的降生成人奧蹟是「將臨期」及「聖誕期」中唯一神聖、中心事件！它的基調是主基督與聖若翰共同呼籲的：「悔改吧！天主的國已經來臨！」

摘自「教友生活周刊」

本 週 讀 經

二零一三年十二月一日

依 2:1-5； 羅 13:11-14； 瑪 24:37-44