A few nights before writing this reflection, a Norbertine confrere shared his frustration over internationals chiding the U.S. for meddling in other countries’ affairs, yet looking to the U.S. to defend them militarily from Russia and other powers. We did not discuss the Second Reading during that night, but maybe we should have. Did Isaiah really mean to suggest that one entity was predestined by God to be superior over others?

I would rather examine today’s First Reading in the context of one theme of Catholic social teaching, “rights and responsibilities.” Our bishops write:

> The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society…..

> In human society one man’s natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right. Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one’s rights and ignore one’s duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other (Peace on Earth, #30).

> As for the State . . . It has also the duty to protect the rights of all its people, and particularly of its weaker members, the workers, women and children. It can never be right for the State to shirk its obligation of working actively for the betterment of the condition of the workingman (Christianity and Social Progress, #20).

We just concluded the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord, basking in the joy of God selecting our race to house his only Son. Of course, we cannot blindly hide our face from the challenges facing our world today, as if difficulties cannot exist because God pitched his tent among us, millennia ago. As the people of Judah were not left off the hook to help redeem a fractured world, we too are expected to manifest the greatness that God shared with us when he invited our whole race to be in relationship with him.

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