December 11, 2016

Is 35:1-6a, 10
Jas 5:7-10
Mt 11:2-11

Third Sunday of Advent (A)

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

As we look at the readings for the Sundays of Advent, we discover that only the gospel passage for the Fourth Sunday makes any reference to the birth of Jesus, and that reference is to the predicament into which his conception placed Mary. If these readings are not meant to focus our attention on his birth, what theme or themes do they highlight? A careful reading will show that during Advent we are called to reflect on the coming age of fulfillment. This age will be a time marked by tranquility and harmony, justice and peace.

While both the first reading and the gospel passage treat this theme, it is the psalm response that states it most straightforwardly. It speaks of justice for the oppressed, bread for the hungry, prisoners set free, sight to the blind, raising those bowed down, protecting the resident alien, aiding the orphan and the widow. This is a description of the age of fulfillment; this is a picture of the kind of society for which we all long. The reading from Isaiah describes this age of fulfilment as a time when physical limitations that hinder full living will be abolished: hands that were feeble will be strengthened; knees that were weak will be firm; eyes that were blind will see; ears that were deaf will hear; tongues that were mute will sing; and those who were lame will leap like stags. Life that was in any way hampered will be regenerated. The prophet speaks of a future time of fulfillment; the gospel passage claims that these marvels were happening through the miracles of Jesus; the psalm states that they are unfolding in the present. But where? And how?

In all of the passages, it is the power of God that transforms the present age of suffering and discord into an age of justice and peace. However, just as the power of God worked through Jesus as he interacted with the people he met, so that same compassionate power of God will work through us as we interact with the people in our lives. It is up to us to bring forth a life of tranquility and harmony, of justice and peace for all. This is the Peaceable Kingdom that is the subject of so many pieces of art; this is the age of fulfillment that God promised, that Jesus inaugurated, and that we are called to bring forth.

Whatever happened to Advent and the coming of Jesus in all of this? First, this peaceable kingdom, this age of fulfillment is really the goal of everything. It is the cosmic convergence of
which the contemporary cosmologists speak; it is the omega point of Teilhard de Chardin. And the incarnation, God’s personal embrace of cosmic reality, is the first step in the unfolding of that marvel. Advent is a reminder for us that this unfolding has begun in our midst, through Jesus and the very earthly stuff of which we are made. This season stands as a challenge for us, asking us what we are doing to make it present and experienced in our world.

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