



a Kendall Hunt Company

Second Sunday of Advent, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Thu, 07/18/2013 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The prophecies of Isaiah celebrated in the Lectionary these four weeks are a hallmark of the Advent season. In today's beautiful, lyrical description of a future, messianic king, the prophet Isaiah gives us a vision of justice and peace that embraces Israel, the human community, and all of creation as well. Taken from a section known as the "Book of Emmanuel," this passage begins with the promise of a king in the line of David, continues with a description of his reign, and concludes with the consequences to be expected in terms of a peace-filled new world order harking back to the Garden of Eden. The virtues of the king described by Isaiah are what the Christian tradition was later to identify as "gifts of the Holy Spirit." The reign of the king is marked by justice, with a right ordering of relationships in society, and championship of the poor as its key ingredients. And the signs of the messianic era found in reconciliation within creation itself enlarge the vision presented to include peace in all its forms. The passage is eschatological, and ends on a note of universalism. In other words, its promise is not bound to current events as if this or that successor to Israel's king will prove or disprove the prophecy. Rather, it is God's Word pulling all who hear it forward into an ultimate future. Christians have interpreted the passage to refer to Jesus the Christ, whom we regard as the messianic king and the fulfillment of God's promises.

In Matthew's Gospel, John the Baptist symbolizes the end of the era of patriarchs and prophets and sets the stage for a new era that begins with Jesus. His clothing of camel's hair is reminiscent of Elijah, his desert food of the Exodus, and his preaching of the call of Deutero-Isaiah. Although John's baptism of repentance is mentioned, the passage focuses more on his preaching, which is eschatological and centers on the coming Messiah and the moral conversion necessary to welcome his reign. Pharisees and Sadducees are both mentioned, though the two groups were enemies of one another, presumably because representatives of both were later opposed to Jesus' message.

John announces the coming of a new age in which no inherited privilege or mere external



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observance can substitute for true conversion or save an individual from the judgment of God. His fearful eschatological images of fire, wrath, the ax, and the winnowing fan (which separates wheat from chaff) remind us of the painful wrenching required to free the world from the grip of sin, even as the idyllic vision of Isaiah offers us hope of the ultimate outcome of such an effort.

Catholic Doctrine

Justice and Peace as a Sign of the Messianic Era

Last Sunday's doctrine section explored the Catholic understanding of time. Today's doctrine section continues that discussion, focusing on the messianic era: a new time or age begun by Christ's coming into the world.

God is a God of promises. A promise is, necessarily, future-oriented. Catholics affirm that the relationship of promise God initiated with humanity, first broached in the covenant with Abraham and then developed throughout the time of Moses and the prophets, comes to its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Something new and vital has entered human history with the event of the incarnation. The Savior who entered our humanity and our history (and thus time) inaugurated the kingdom of God that will culminate in the final judgment and the fullness of the divine dominion. Thus, for believers, history from the time of Christ onward can be characterized as having entered the messianic era.

As the perfect human being, Jesus embodies God's justice and peace. Through his ministry, Jesus planted the seeds of God's reign, which Isaiah's prophetic vision extols. It is through Christ that this promised vision will come to its full stature—a kingdom that does not merely pay lip service to the Most High, but whose subjects are imbued with divine qualities and live those qualities in their relationships and actions. Thus, the flowering of justice and peace are signs of the messianic era. Justice, in this context, is not something abstract, but consists of relationships in harmony with God's will and law, always founded on solicitude for the poor and weak. Peace is not just the absence of war, but total well-being grounded in friendship with God, centered in the human community but also extended to harmony with the whole created order.

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