

Homily on Isaiah 2:1-5 (St. Francis Xavier)

December 3, 2018

Intro: The OT has two ways of Yahweh's establishing perfect justice and peace. Apocalyptic writers see the world as so regularly filled with evil, that God can establish perfect justice and peace only after the end of history in a new heavens and a new earth. The prophets, however, think that if Israel would live perfectly the law God had given them, then God's peace would spread over the whole earth within human history. Today's oracle from Isaiah is a classic example of this prophetic eschatology.

Isaiah's oracle thinks that Israel's living God's covenantal laws will make them prosper as a nation. People from other nations will come to Jerusalem to trade with Israel, and, while there, they will be struck by the goodness of Israelites. They will trace that goodness to their observance of the Ten Commandments and their worship of God in the temple on Mount Zion. And so these Gentiles speak out in today's oracle: "Come, let's climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways and we may walk in his paths."

They want to learn the law of God and so come to the integrity and prosperity that Israel enjoys. The oracle claims that from the temple on Mount Zion will go forth the needed instruction in God's laws.

Isaiah then draws the conclusion of this migration: God will judge between the nations, and impose his laws on many peoples. Then, with this international law, will come peace. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Once nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again." Armaments will turn into instruments for agriculture; people will be fed, and there will be no more war on earth.

What will bring this glorious reign of God about? The oracle concludes with Isaiah's exhortation to Israel to live by their covenanted laws and worship of God: "Come, House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

The Meaning for us this Advent:

We don't have to choose between apocalyptic and prophetic eschatologies. Both are true and both relevant for us today. Advent will speak of the apocalyptic eschatology, and so we can concentrate on the prophetic version of Isaiah today.

The message for us is quite clear from the last line of the oracle: We are so to live according to God's revelation that the unbelieving world will want to live according to God's will themselves. Then, with one international law, all nations will come to prosperity and peace on earth.

How to find a short summary of that revelation for our conduct? We are to love God with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul and our whole strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. When asked who is our neighbor, Jesus replied: the Samaritan, the hated alien.

God's concern, in both the Old Testament and the New is for the widow, the orphan, the vulnerable, the alienated. If we want peace on earth, we have to be concerned for those whom God wants us to protect. That means, of course, the refugees at the gates of our country. But it also means the poor in other countries who need wells and schools more than they need our armies. Closer to home it means our concern for the homeless in our cities, pregnant women in difficult socio-economic circumstances, inner-city black lives at risk, those imprisoned for minor offenses and those condemned for great ones. You can add to this list your favorite vulnerable (and even hated) people.

All of this means sacrifices for us as a country. "America First" is the opposite of the gospel. But it also means sacrifices for us individually. That is why we come back regularly to this Eucharist, where we remember God's sacrifice of his Son for us, and, through communion in Christ's Body and Blood we are empowered to be his continuing sacrifice in our world.

Come, let us walk in the light of our Lord!