

Fourth Sunday of Advent [A] December 23, 2007

Author:

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Short Description:

Readings:

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

Calendar:

December 25: Christmas

Quotes:

The true apostle is first of all a person who is "tuned in", a servant ready for God's action.

--John Paul II, Athens, May 5, 2001

There are a wealth of signs that promise hope in the kairos of a new springtime of the Gospel!

--John Paul II, 10 August 2004

... the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing.

--Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi

This Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties. Nor are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. ... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. Long since, the Prophets of the Old Testament fought vehemently against this scandal and even more so did Jesus Christ Himself in the New Testament threaten it with grave punishments. ... Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. Christians who neglect their temporal duties, jeopardizes their eternal salvation.

--Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, 43

Three thoughts for your consideration:

1. Ahaz seems to be fearful of asking God for a sign. Ahaz seems to be fearful of expecting something great from God. Is this somehow analogous to the fear that some people have about speaking up for justice and peace? Is this somehow analogous to the fear that some people have about sharing what they believe concerning justice and peace? Is this analogous to the fear that some of us have that nothing can change? In the case of Ahaz, God is weary of this fear. God is willing to make a great and extraordinary promise. We are called to make the assumption that great things can happen with God's inspiration. Are we willing to believe that social change is possible? Are we willing to believe that we can put Catholic Social Teaching into practice?
1. Paul reminds us that we are called to "belong to Jesus Christ," that we are called to be holy. We called to expect something great – to be something great. We can be holy! We can even have that type of holiness that is more than a conventional piety

or superficial holiness. We can be people who put the faith into practice. Do you believe that we can be community of faith, which works courageously for justice and peace?

1. In the gospel, Joseph is a righteous man. He seeks to do with is right. Then, Joseph discovers that what is right is not what he and the tradition had called for. God asks him for something unconventional. "Take Mary as your wife." Believe that all this is happening by "the power of the Holy Spirit." Joseph is invited to think outside the box. Are we too invited to think outside of the "box" of our culture and the conventional value system of our country? We too are called to be faithful to the vision of God and work for a new era of peace and justice for all.

Questions for Reflection in your Faith Sharing Group:

When have you acted with a confidence that change and growth is possible?

Did this confidence bring about powerful results?

Actions – Links:

Pax Christi International invites people to send electronic Christmas Peace and Justice Wishes & Prayers to the people of Bethlehem at <http://www.paxchristi.net/xm/index.php> . You can read the messages that others have already sent.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture is a membership organization committed to ending U.S.-sponsored torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. You can sign their statement of conscience at <http://www.nrcat.org/index.php> .

"Crazy Facts":

- The World Bank says that extreme poverty means living on less than US\$1 per day. In 2001 they estimated that 1.1 billion people had consumption levels below \$1 a day.
- According to an American Research Group, Inc. survey US shoppers are planning to spend an average of \$859 for gifts this holiday season.
- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2006 Year Book on Armaments reports that world military expenditure in 2005 is estimated to have reached 1,118 trillion dollars which corresponds to 2.5 per cent of world GDP or an average spending of \$173 per capita.

Prayers of Intercession:

Response: Emmanuel -- God be with us.

For an end to all war and fighting, we pray....

For an end to all our preparations for war, we pray....

For an end to all our divisions, for an end to racism and discrimination, we pray....

For an end to the use of torture and violence in any situation, we pray....

For an end to end to all slavery and oppression, we pray....

For a new courage and commitment to peace and justice for all, we pray....

For the beginning of a new commitment to address human needs, we pray....

For a new and genuine commitment to the common good, we pray....

Prayer - Meditation:

Various prayers for Christmas can be found at the site of the CAFOD, England's Catholic Agency for Overseas Development:

http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/worship/prayers/church_calendar/prayer...

“God will make a Way where there seems to be no way.”

A Christmas Prayer by Philip Berrigan can be found at:

http://www.jonahhouse.org/Phil_ChristmasPrayer.htm

--Lectionary Reflection by John Bucki, S.J.