



December 4, 2022

Second Sunday of Advent

"Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a child to guide them." Isaiah 11:6



Dear Friends,

The vision of the Prophet Isaiah in our reading today seems like an impossible fantasy. How should we understand his vision? What would such a world look like? We believe that we have already seen a glimpse of this coming world with the arrival of Jesus who has set up his tent among us in our lives, relationships, and communities. His coming, and the gift of the Holy Spirit moves us closer to the harmony and accord of opposites in the fullness of the Kingdom.

In a recent interview with Pope Francis, the new editor, Sam Sawyer S.J., of America Magazine asked Francis about the polarization in the Church and politics in the world and particularly the United States. This was something of which the Pope warned Congress, in his 2015 visit to the U.S. Fr Sawyer points out that polarization has only grown in the Church and the body politic since then. How should the Church respond to polarization within its own life and help to respond to the polarization in our larger society?

Pope Francis responded: *"Polarization is not Catholic. A Catholic cannot think either-or and reduce everything to polarization. The essence of Catholic is both-and. The Catholic unites the good and the not-so-good. There is only one people of God. When there is polarization, a divisive mentality arises, which privileges some and leaves others behind. The Catholic always harmonizes differences...The Holy Spirit in the church does not reduce everything to just one value; rather it harmonizes opposing differences. That is the Catholic spirit. The more harmony there is between the differences and opposites the more Catholic it is...I repeat it: what is Catholic is not either-or, but it is both-and, combining differences. And this is how we understand the Catholic way of dealing with sin, which is not puritanical: saints and sinners, both together."*

Even as we look to our Gospel reading today it may appear that John the Baptist is a source of polarization. He is rightfully challenging and condemning the elites. They have enriched themselves, cooperated with the Roman Imperial occupiers, and all this on the backs of the poor. John demands they demonstrate a change of direction, that is the meaning of 'repentance.' He challenges, "produce the evidence of conversion" then submit to baptism.

The thing about John is he realizes that his is not the final message. He awaits something or someone else. And when Jesus comes forward to be baptized, John will argue with him. Why should he who comes to bring God's final judgment submit to a baptism of repentance? Jesus insists and John relents. Jesus is going to take up the mantle from John but move in an opposite direction. Jesus calls John the greatest of the prophets, yet in referring to himself, Jesus will say to his listeners "here you have something greater than John."

Jesus will move from John's fiery demands to invitation to relationship. He moves from penitential baptisms to fellowship meals. He moves from threats to persuasion, from laws to ideals, from hostility to friendship. The prophetic message of John awakens us to the need for change. We cannot merely surrender to things as they are. But Jesus actively moves us to that new world of God's harmonious peace. We need both. And this season challenges us to learn to be in harmony with those who are different than us.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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