

2nd Sunday of Advent, 4 December 2022

Scriptures: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Homily: Fr. Ken

In ancient times many people told stories about a time when everything was good. The Greeks and Romans, for example, talked about the "Golden Age". In the so-called "Golden Age" there was no suffering and no hard work; and there were no natural disasters. Gods and humans lived in harmony.

In some ways, such stories are very much like the Jewish and Christian idea of humanity before the Fall. Adam and Eve walked in Eden, in harmony with God, with each other, and with the whole of creation. The pagan equivalent of the time after the Fall was called the "Iron Age", because everything had become more difficult and less harmonious.

So there seems to be something akin to a common memory of a "golden age". Even today you hear members of the Native Sons of the Golden West talk about "the good old days".

Some cultures also believed that the Golden Age could return. The Roman poet Virgil saw a time when a divine child would be born of a virgin, and the world would be happy again. The Earth would be fruitful without the need for difficult work, peace and justice would be established, there would be harmony in the animal kingdom. Virgil even imagined sheep that could grow wool of different colors, including, for example, purple, scarlet, and yellow.

It may be that the Romans were actually getting such ideas from the Hebrew scriptures. The first reading from the book of Isaiah, contains such visions, including ideas of harmony in the world of

animals. Psalm 72 also has a picture of the ideal ruler sent by God. At the time when Virgil was writing, just prior to the birth of Jesus, there was a general belief that God would somehow visit the created world. Such an idea was clearest in the Jewish tradition.

The trouble with such ideas is that they could be easily misunderstood. Many rulers imagined that they themselves were chosen by God. Some even gave themselves titles like "Epiphany" and "Savior". The Emperor Caligula famously declared himself to actually be a god.

The message of John the Baptist is quite different, however. He tells people that in order even to recognize the divine Messiah, and to welcome him properly, they have to repent. There is no room for pride or self-satisfaction in the presence of God. John even tells the Sadducees and Pharisees, many of whom did lead good lives, and knew the scriptures, that they have to repent. Although they can claim Abraham as their father, they cannot rely on this alone. God is coming to offer salvation to all people, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading. Christ became the servant of the Jewish people to keep God's promises, and became a servant of all peoples because of God's mercy.

The way that John chooses for people to show their repentance is baptism. He is careful to point out, though, that this is only a sign. Just as John is not the Christ, so his baptism is not the true baptism that forgives sins. As John says, the baptism that Christ will give is baptism with the power of the Holy Spirit and the fire of God's love. Just as all the good things of the Old Testament were gifts of God and had their use, now Christ, the gift of God, has come to fulfill them all. He is the gift of God because he is God, fully human and fully divine.

As the gift of God, Christ gives us more than any dream of a new Golden Age. While we work for a just and peaceful earth in this life, we can never forget the eternal vocation that Christ has

given us. The risen Christ has gone to prepare a place for us. All time belongs to him, and through the gifts of faith, hope, and love, through the sacraments that he gives us, all time becomes real for us. This is especially true for the Mass. The Mass represents Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, which happened in the past. It gives us grace, enlightens our minds and strengthens our hearts in the present. It also prepares us for our future, for eternal life with God when we will enjoy the fullness of friendship with God, face to face.

This is far better and more suited to our human nature than any Golden Age returning. As we prepare to celebrate the past gift of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, we can reflect on how this brightens our present, and offers us a glorious future.

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