

2nd Sunday Advent (A) (Matt 3:1-12)

I once had a friend that was about 200 years old. My friend was gnarly and twisted and wrinkled and had seen a lot in his long lifetime. My friend commanded great veneration in the neighborhood because he was so old. My friend was very generous, for he fed the neighborhood squirrels and always welcomed the birds who came to visit. My friend was a regal old oak tree that was planted right in the middle of a street where I used to live. Cars simply drove reverently around my friend, respecting his right to be there. Then one day, tragedy struck. My old friend died from some unknown cause. His leaves turned a dull brown and his bark had the pallor of death. No more could he bear acorns to feed the hungry squirrels. Each day when I walked by, I would look for some sign of life; some little bit of green that would be a sign of hope, a sign of life and renewal. But no; and so I mourned the death of my 200 year old friend.

Isaiah too speaks of a dead tree, the stump of Jesse, a dead stump that no longer gives the promise of life and hope. That dead stump symbolizes the lineage of Jesse, father of King David, doomed to hopelessness and despair. But no! Unlike the death of my sturdy old oak tree, a green shoot does spring forth from the seemingly dead stump of Jesse, a bright bud does blossom from its roots. That bright bud, that green shoot is called Jesus Messiah, the one who brings life and hope to a despairing world.

Maybe some of you are feeling sort of like a dead stump these days, preparing to Christmas shop and preoccupied with Christmas preparations. Perhaps you're looking forward to being with your family at Christmas, or perhaps you're dreading it. Or you may feel very much alone at this time, far from home and family and friends. Maybe money is really tight and you're bombarded by advertisements for the "perfect gift," and you're frustrated. Where can hope and the desire for peace be found in the midst of feeling like a dead stump? Maybe there's a green bud sprouting from the dead root of Jesse for you.

"The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." To Jesus, our redeemer and messiah, these were gifts of power, the power of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of power enabled Jesus not to judge others by appearances or hearsay, not just by what his eyes see or his ears hear, but to judge the poor and afflicted with compassion and with faithfulness. For Jesus reveals to us his heavenly Father as a God of utter fidelity to his beloved people.

These same gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to us in Baptism and Confirmation, empower us also to be people of justice and loving compassion in our daily lives, to be in harmony with the God who loves us so much that he sent Jesus to become one of us, and to be loving people in harmony with ourselves and with one another. Paul in his letter to the Romans speaks of that today. "May God, the source of all patience and encouragement, enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Accept and welcome one another as Christ welcomed and accepted you for the glory of God."

In the midst of our deadness and weariness, we can look with hope to the promise of the green shoot that buds forth, and whose birth we look forward to celebrating once again. Let us give thanks; let us give Eucharist, for this sign of hope.

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