

Ministerial Eucharist with Region 7 and 8 DEMs – December 1, 2016

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus be with you all.

Listen to this. Listen to this! This is what the coming administration will be like:

Defending the cause of the poor,
giving deliverance from oppression. (Ps 72:4)
Judging with righteousness and equity. (Isaiah 11:4)
Bringing back the abundant prosperity of the earth. (Ps 72:3)
Delighting in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:3)
Ending all hurt and destruction. (Isaiah 11:9)
Bringing world peace through diplomacy. (Isaiah 11:6-8, 10)

The Isaiah text is all about this coming administration. The Psalm is all about this coming administration. Even the Epistle is about this. Paul, leaning on the Septuagint and interpreting *ever so slightly* declares:

The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope. (Romans 15:12)

Now, I realize that my vote on November 8 was not about this coming administration. Neither has *any* American presidential election

held the promise of establishing *this* coming administration. This is because this coming administration is bigger than what happens in America.

The *root* of this coming administration is deeper than the civilization that built the pyramids in Egypt. And its *promised branch* reaches out to the end of time itself. Between root and branch sits the *stump of Jesse*, the picture of a hope that seems clearly to have failed.

And yet, a hope that has remained active in the hearts and minds of people for a very long time. A hope that has been taught and learned, treasured and handed on, while empires have come and gone.

Listen to this! The stump of Jesse, a hope lying between root and branch, has endured through the rise and fall of the Late Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, and the Third Reich, just to name a few of those earthly kingdoms most familiar to us that have come and gone.

And all the while, the root held its place, and the branch held its promise, and the stump sat there, a sign of what had been, and what was not, now. But also a sign of hope, a sign of what is yet to be.

Because for those who have eyes to see, there is already a shoot growing out of that stump. A tender sprout there, in the very place and from the very form that most clearly bears witness to failure, to an ending. That promised shoot sprouted long ago, in the incarnation of the Son of God.

So, leaving aside metaphors for the moment, and turning to the purely historical, the reign of the sons of Jesse, King David and his son, King Solomon, was just like every other earthly kingdom. Glorious for a moment. And in that moment human civilization *flourished* in a particular time and place, and also real people in the same time and place *suffered* in very real ways. The kingdoms of this earth are like that. Their glory comes at a price paid by the poor and by the outsider.

So also, when the kingdom of David and Solomon weakened and divided and grew weary and fell, it was just like every other earthly kingdom. A catastrophe. A terrific loss of good and beautiful things, and a deep sorrow for real people, living in a particular place and time. But also a victory and a new day for *another* people, from a *different* place, whose national glory found a timely occasion to rise in the untimely falling of another earthly kingdom.

This is the pattern of earthly kingdoms. They rise and fall, and each, in turn, glorifies its own people, its own way of life, at the expense of the other.

But there is something *different* about the stump of Jesse. There's something *eternally compelling* about the residual memory of this particular earthly kingdom. And that is that *it bears within itself* a character and a nature that belong to God, the eternal, the heavenly, that which rises and does not fall, a day after which no night follows.

The thing to which the Church bears witness is the curious claim that *within* the historical narrative of a certain people and their particular way of life is embedded an eternal, heavenly story that belongs to all people of every time and place. *The Christ was born to Israel*. That's our curious claim. And the long-cherished metaphor for this confession is the stump of Jesse with a new shoot growing out of it.

What makes this heavenly reign different from all the earthly Empires that have risen and fallen around it?

For one thing, its character. Listen to the language of the Scriptural witness to this coming administration: this is a kingdom of righteousness, of equity, care for the poor, welcome for the stranger,

delight in the fear of the Lord, and peace among those as different as wolves and lambs are.

Earthly kingdoms reach for these things, sometimes, or claim that they do, but in the end they cannot manage them. Earthly kingdoms, in the end, serve “our way of life” at the expense of the other. This coming administration is not like that. It is different. Its holy character sets it apart.

And secondly, it is an administration that belongs to all nations. Earthly empires extend the influence of one people over many others. This heavenly reign draws all peoples together into one community of peace. And inasmuch as the coming administration can be epitomized by the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, it is a heavenly reign that offers the self for the other, a new kind of life that finds its own life in the life of the other, springing up precisely from the place where the life of the self was brought to an end by wickedness of the other.

This is the polar opposite of childish bullying or adolescent dominance or a subtle and polished exertion of power over the other. This coming administration gives the self for the sake of the other, and from that gift springs life from the very stump of wrongful death.

Advent is a celebration of this coming administration. And it is an invitation to participate in preparing the way for its coming. How might we do that? How might we prepare the way of the Lord?

John the Baptist tells us: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.” So, we might understand that to mean that we should pursue righteousness, equity, care for the poor, welcome for the stranger, delight in the fear of the lord, and peace among people as different as wolves are from lambs. Who could argue with that?

Or, we might prepare the way for the coming administration by refusing to give any earthly kingdom the ultimacy that it desires. No earthly kingdom can save the world, or separate the world from the saving love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, for that matter. Preparing the way for the coming administration might well be a refusal to be either enthralled or deflated by any earthly kingdom!

But I think there is another bit of wisdom that John teaches us, that we might take home with us today. John declares, “God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.” (MT 3:9) Just as surely as God can bring forth a living shoot from the age-old stump of Jesse, so also from subjects as unlikely as stones can God provide

children to Abraham. Preparing the way of the coming administration may best be accomplished by confessing that we are, by our own wisdom and strength, no more likely than stones to usher in world peace! And then in faith suitable to those redeemed by Christ, to live and work firmly convinced that even in and through a people such as us God's purpose may yet be fulfilled.

In our day, and in our time, as the Empire to which we belong rises or falls, we teach and learn the hope that is embodied in the metaphor of the stump of Jesse. We treasure it and we hand it on, so that the hope of all the ages may find faithful stewards in us, in this place and in our time, until that shoot branches out to all the world, to the end of time, to bring to all people that peace which the world cannot give.

This is our prayer and our confession of faith. A shoot *shall* rise from the stump of Jesse, and all people shall find in it their hope and their peace.

Amen.