

The First Sunday of Advent *December 1, 2019*

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” (Isaiah 2:4)

The prophet Isaiah lived during a very turbulent time. The people of God were splintered into two countries; Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Furthermore, these two were sandwiched between the two major ancient powers of Assyria and Egypt. The country of Israel, seeking an alliance with both Syria and Egypt, would fall under the weight of Assyrian expansion. Judah, sorely tempted to join this doomed alliance, would see the Assyrian army invade and siege Jerusalem. Isaiah foretold God’s intervention, if the citizens would remain faithful. Historians are uncertain as to the exactly what occurred, but a mysterious illness or plague would ravage the Assyrian encampment leading to their immediate withdrawal from Judah. However, Judah would remain an Assyrian vassal state for the remainder of Isaiah’s life.

If we were to place ourselves in Jerusalem during this time, viewing the Assyrian army stationed just outside the walls, I think we can all understand both the hopelessness of the situation and the anguish of the people. Graphic stories and unsubstantiated rumors of what has happened to the people of our sister country Israel abound. And like the children’s game of “Telephone”, I believe these stories would grow becoming more exaggerated with each retelling. It is no wonder that when the besiegers finally did leave there would be an enormous sense of general relief due to God’s divine action. Yet, this time would also see a rise in the number of prominent voices demanding the king to just make peace at any cost. With each plea, I believe the king would hear these or similar words - “Sire, the people are weary.”

Isaiah, under divine inspiration, sought to remind God’s people of the importance of not allowing weariness and fear to overcome their hope that God does intercede on their behalf. The same God who heard the cries of their ancestors who had become slaves in Egypt hears their cry now. He is preparing them for a new time, a springtime where war and suffering would cease, becoming footnotes of the past. For this to become their reality, they must continue to remain loyal to His commands. As Isaiah would write: *“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet **I will not forget you.**”* (Isaiah 49:15).

As we begin this new Advent in the year of our Lord 2019, let us remind ourselves that He has not forgotten us. Yes, it may seem that we are surrounded by the forces of evil, much like Assyria encamped around Jerusalem. And yes, we may have become slack and weary over this past year in our loyalty towards God’s commands. Yet, He has not forgotten you! His love and loyalty toward each of us is so much greater than any offense any of us have directed toward Him. As we seek to begin this, our preparation for Christmas, let us be reminded that He has already acted for both our ancestors and ourselves by sending His Son to earth to redeem us and save us from our sins. Let us confess our transgressions, seek His forgiveness through sacramental Reconciliation, and prepare to receive Him into our hearts who loves us more than we can ever fathom.