

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, November 23, 2009**

Advent! A new season and new year begin this Sunday, November 29, 2009. I'm never sure whether Advent's lessons invite pastoral comfort or prophetic assault. Perhaps both! What they do, for sure, invite and require is a poet's ear and sensibilities as the images are rich and challenging.

### **Jeremiah 33: 14 - 16**

From a portion of Jeremiah sometimes called "The Book of Consolation," which has the exile in view and affirms that despite all, God is still God and God's promises shall stand forever. In this case, the particular promise is God's faithfulness to the Davidic covenant; God's promise of a leader who shall execute "justice and righteousness" in the land. Biblical promises and messianic expectation always raise for me the question of the "how we wait," or the nature of faithful waiting. There is the passive type, which imagines that someday God will fix everything. And there is what one might call "active waiting," which works for justice and righteousness even while awaiting its greater fulfillment in God's plan and time. I prefer the latter. Note a certain interesting tension with last week's "Christ the King" gospel where Jesus says "My kingdom is not of this world." Here the promised one is clearly concerned with this world (as also was Jesus in John's gospel) and with the establishment of an order that allows life to flourish.

### **I Thessalonians 3: 9 - 13**

Paul writes from Corinth to the beloved congregation he established in Thessalonika. Such warmth in this words to those who live "between the times." Between, that is, the first coming or Advent, the first experience of Christ's blessing, and the second coming/ Advent, when his work is brought to completion and fulfillment. That is where we live too, is it not? We have known God's grace and mercy and yet live in the midst of a fallen world, caught ourselves, so often, in its fallen-ness and wrecked relationships. And what is Paul's prayer for those who "live between the times"? That "the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you." To live between the times is to live with uncertainty and some anxiety. Anxiety tempts us to fearfulness, isolation and reactivity. Paul prays for a different spirit for those lives in uncertain times, a spirit of faith, courage and love, expressed in "holiness," (verse 13). This is the active, faithful waiting suggested in my comments on Jeremiah above.

### **Luke 21: 25 - 36**

We can, for the gospel text certainly does, keep going on the theme of "Living In Anxious and Uncertain Times." Two weeks ago we heard from the apocalyptic chapter of Mark, now we are in the parallel from the new gospel of the year, Luke. We begin (first Sunday of new year), so to speak, at the end (the fulfillment, consummation of all things). One world is passing away amid tumult and distress, and a new one is being born ("Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.") Though times may be hard, a new beginning is at hand as surely as the green leaves appearance on the fig tree signals summer

coming. And then, in verse 34, again the ethics. How to live between the times, how to live in times of uncertainty. Not by being weighed down or numbed out. Rather, be alert, prayerful, strong and ready to give an account of yourself to your Lord. Advent, then, is so much more than "getting ready for Christmas." It is a season that bids us be on spiritual high alert. However, our alertness is not to be anxious but calm, not fearful but faithful, not marked by blame but by love. A good word for our own dark and anxious times. A blessed Advent to you my dear friends!