

Homily – Advent 1 – B – Isaiah 64

Text – Isaiah 64:9 – **Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people.**

When I first read the text for today, it struck me that these were not some words strung together or even words that told a story. No, these are words of prayer. These are words that easily could be said by a person praying alone or a great congregation coming together in the Divine Service. These are truly deep, soulful words addressed to the One, Almighty God.

Prayer is an important part of the Christian faith. It is something which the Scripture urges us to do constantly. But when are people the most fervent in prayer? Do we really **pray without ceasing**? If we are honest, we find that we pray only when we feel the time is right especially when the times are challenging. We may pray when times are good. We may pray for others if we feel they may need one. But truly praying with heart and soul is more often done when times seem to be impossible; where our whole world has turned upside down and we don't know what to do next.

In the previous chapters to our text, the blessed prophet Isaiah declared some really good news. He foretold of the coming of the New Testament church. This Church would be glorious and its people would come from many nations. This glorious Church would proclaim freedom to those enslaved by sin. And all who gathered there would be called **The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD** and this name would be known throughout the world. These words should bring about a time for prayers of jubilation and praise to God in heaven.

The present situation of the land of Judah is a far different picture. They had rebelled against God. They had grieved the Holy Spirit through their false worship and idolatry. They had hardened their hearts and wandered from the ways of the Lord.

As a consequence of this rebellious spirit, the Lord permitted Judah's enemies to trample in the great sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem. Gentile, pagan nations who had never called upon God and praised His holy name now ruled over the last

remnant of the children of Israel. And now, Isaiah and all the nation of Judah witnessed the total destruction of Jerusalem and now saw the people being humiliated and carried away into captivity in Babylon. So, what our text records is the prophet Isaiah's plea on behalf of a broken nation.

He prays for the Lord to **rend the heavens and come down** and that, by such a demonstration of heavenly might, all **the nations might tremble at His presence**. He specifically recalls how God did **awesome things that the people did not look for** such as the plagues on Egypt and the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea and how when He **came down** to Mt Sinai, **the mountains quaked at His presence**. The blessed prophet also confesses the saving truth; that **no eye has seen a God besides Him**, a loving God **who acts for those who wait for Him**.

The prayer then becomes a reality check. The nation of Judah knows why they are being carried off into bondage in another country. If they were people of solid faith, if they were the people they promised to be, the Lord would be with them for He **meets all who joyfully work righteousness, who remember the Lord in their ways**. If they were faithful, they would be living in their homeland.

The prophet Isaiah is right in saying that the Lord is angry, not because He's having a moment or is fickle in His feelings. No, the reason is simple; **they sinned** and this is not something new. They have been living in their sins **for a long time**. Their sin was so great that it would seem impossible for them to be saved. They were so **unclean**, that even their so – called **righteous deeds were like a polluted garment**. And now, as they walk the road to Babylon, they felt that they were **all fading like a leaf**, and **their iniquities, like the wind**, were the reason for them to be **taken away**. Even though destruction had been prophesied, no one had **called on the name** of the Lord. They were so asleep in their sins that no one **was rousing himself to take hold of the Lord**. Now it seems that the Lord has **hidden His face from them**, as the nation **melts away in the hand of their iniquities**. All seems to be lost.

In the final verses, the prayer finds its place: in deep humility. Before their Father in heaven, they confess that **they are the clay, and that the Lord is the potter**. They are in His hands. They realize that they are not the kings and gods who shape all things but rather are the **works of His hand**. It is by God's blessed Word that He shapes them into not only a great nation but more importantly a faithful nation; His Church.

This great prayer ends in humble confession. **"Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all Your people."** It is from these ashes, from this despair and from this sorrow that the Lord would restore them. They would again rebuild a nation. They would rejoice in the Lord's grace as they returned home and they would sing songs of praise that celebrate the mercy of God. They would be a forgiven nation living in their God – blessed land.

Today, we begin the season of Advent. It is a time of preparation. In joy, it points us to the coming of another year spent in the light of God's grace. It also reminds us that these many years of grace will soon draw to a close with the return of Christ our Lord. This glorious season reminds all people of the need to be ready, to treasure the grace that our God still grants us every day of our lives and to realize that in this grace of our heavenly Father lies our one constant hope; the hope of life everlasting. So, as we prepare ourselves for the return of our Lord, let us keep in mind this beautiful prayer of the prophet for it paints the complete picture of who God is, who we are and the proper focus of the heart as we await the great and awesome day of the Lord.

Lord Jesus, You have promised, **"Surely I am coming soon"** to which Your Church responds, **"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Rend the heavens and come down. Make the mountains quake at Your presence. Cause the nations to tremble at Your presence!** From the very creation of the universe, **no one has heard nor has any eye seen a God besides You**. From everlasting to everlasting, You alone are God."

You are a God of justice. In Your grace, You **meet those who joyfully work righteousness** and hold close those who

remember You in Your ways. Such is Your great love for us frail human beings. In such joy, we would only know the true peace which only You can provide.

Yet, **we have sinned** and have done what is evil in Your sight. This isn't some rare and freak occurrence. No, **we have been in our sins** for a long time, since our conception. When we truly examine ourselves, we find that **we have all become like one who is unclean**, and that **all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment**. In our weakness, we fail to **call upon Your name**, we give in to temptation and rely on our feeble strength to get by. The more we lean upon ourselves, the more we fail to take hold of You through Your Word and sacrament, the more **we melt in the hand of our iniquities**. So long as we listen to the lies of the devil, believe the foolishness of this world and lean upon our own understanding, the more we give You cause to **hide Your face from us** and leave us to our own ruin.

It is here, in this Advent season, that we are reminded of Your mercy; Your absolute love in the face of our absolute shame. We look back to the time when You sent Your Son to share our human weakness in order that we may receive Your strength. We celebrate His ministry whereby He poured out Your mercy and grace upon a people who are starving and are in need of the pure spiritual food which only You can provide. We bow our heads, remembering His agony and bloody sweat as He carried the burden of our sinfulness to the cross. By His death, He removed Your anger that we deserve and by His glorious resurrection, we are now declared to be Your people; Your forgiven, loved and restored people.

As we wait for Your Son's promised return, let us ever remember that **we are the clay, and You are our potter**; that **we are all the work of Your hands**. Mold our stubborn foolish will into Your good and perfect will. Shape us through Your Word. Strengthen us through the kiln of affliction that we may be ready to stand firm in the faith until Your Son returns in glory. In Him alone, **we are all your people**.

AMEN