



December 22, 2013 Fourth Sunday of Advent

...“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid...” Matthew 1:20

Dear Friends;

People have always hoped for and celebrated heroes. Heroes are people who are able to rise above difficult circumstances. Heroes do not think only of themselves but others. They work for justice and the common good. They are most concerned for the least and lowest. Heroes do not let their own personal fears and insecurities stop them from doing what is good and just. They trust in God and the basic goodness and decency of others.

Cowards, on the other hand, are only looking out for number one (themselves). They calculate every action they make. “How will this benefit me? If it does not help me I do not care. If helping others benefits me and my reputation I will act. But if no one is looking I do not act.” The coward is always suspicious and threatened by others. The coward trusts only in self.

Today’s Scriptures present us with both a coward and a hero. In the first reading from Isaiah we see the prophet urge the weak and ineffective king, Ahaz, to trust in God. In contrast in Matthew’s Gospel, Joseph trusts in God.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel and its neighbor Syria tried to pressure Ahaz and his kingdom of Judah to join them in fighting the mighty Assyrian Empire. When Ahaz refuses, Israel and Syria attack Judah. Ahaz thinks he can get out of trouble by forming an alliance with Assyria. Isaiah the Prophet counsels against this very dangerous idea. Assyria was ruthless and brutal. This could backfire on Ahaz and the Kingdom of Judah.

Isaiah counsels reliance on God. He tells Ahaz “Ask God for a sign.” But Ahaz will not listen. He thinks he knows it all. God through Isaiah says, “I will give you a sign, a baby.” This means that God will act despite Ahaz. He can be replaced. Like Herod who will be threatened by the birth of Jesus, Ahaz will not welcome such a promise. But God will make good on the promise to sustain the line of David forever. This promise is what gives hope for a hero-messiah-king. Eventually in Jesus, a descendant of David, God will fulfill that promise.

Our hero in the Gospel is Joseph. Betrothed (first stage of formal marriage) to Mary but before they live together, Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant. He knows that he is not the father. This would constitute adultery. Under the law he could have Mary put to death by stoning.

Joseph is a good man. He thinks more of others than his injured pride. He is willing to quietly divorce Mary. Then the father of the baby would be free to marry Mary. But Joseph has a dream that urges him to trust in Mary and trust in God. This child is conceived by God. He will be called *Yeshuah* (God-saves). The child will be a sign that God is with his people. But this can only happen if Joseph accepts the child as his own.

Unlike Ahaz, Joseph is willing to hear the prophetic voice. It is Joseph that gives Jesus legitimate claim as a descendent of David. Joseph is the hero who saves the day. He does not give into fear and mistrust. He puts his faith in God. God comes to live with us in this child of Mary. Joseph is an honorable and just man. He takes in Mary.

Writer Carl Sandburg said, “A baby is God’s opinion that the world should go on.” In the child Jesus its God’s opinion that the world should continue on eternally!

Peace,

Fr. Ron

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