

HOMILY: 2nd SUN ADVENT, A, 5/12/10, SOHO

- **Isaiah 11:1-10. * Rom 15:4-9. * Mt 3:1-12.**

At certain points in our lives we may find ourselves doubting the love of God, doubting that God loves us. This doubting may spring from one or several sources or experiences. Our **first reading** reminds us of God's mysterious wisdom, insight and power. God *does not judge by appearances* or pronounce *on hearsay*. Those regarded as wretched and poor will experience God's integrity and equity. God clothes Himself with integrity and faithfulness. We note that word *integrity* is emphasised.

There is always the human temptation to judge the book by the cover. In so many areas in our lives appearances are judged to be important or indeed very important. Mrs Bouquet (or should I say Mrs Bucket?) is not the only offender in this domain. As you know, it can lead to a great superficiality within us and in our interpersonal relationships. Sometimes it can be deceptive, unintentionally or intentionally. Similarly with making judgements based on hearsay, on information several times removed, or on gossip. Many an injustice has been perpetrated by such means. Brokenness, loss of integrity can be the fruits of judgements constructed on the quicksands of appearances and hearsay. Therefore, we are grateful for God's immense integrity and true but compassionate insight! The psalmist expresses it revealingly: *O Lord, you search me and you know me ... all my ways lie open to you. ... For it was you who created my being ... Already you knew my soul ... Your eyes saw all my actions ... before one of them came into being* (Ps 138). It is the insight of a loving Creator.

Generosity is another attractive characteristic of God. Through God's sheer generosity we also are clothed in integrity, in God's integrity. The prophet Isaiah gives us a little glimpse of that integrity, that integration that awaits us, that is already mysteriously at work in us, like yeast. All that is fragmented, polarised & broken within creation, and between one another and within ourselves will be harmonised, made whole. The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther with the kid, the calf with the lion, the cow with the bear, the lion with the ox, the infant with the viper. Opposites are transformed and harmonised. The predatory and the vulnerable, the dangerous and the safe, innocence and bruised experience. Those parts of us that are destructive are harnessed and integrated into what is life-giving, both to ourselves and to others. Nothing and no one is a threat, but instead complements. Difference enhances. The enemy becomes a friend.

In today's **second reading**, St Paul challenges us to persevere, not to give up, either on ourselves or on each other. He draws our attention to the

ancient Sacred Scriptures. These Scriptures *teach us something about hope*, giving many examples of people who did not give up. For example, we may think of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, King David, Mary Magdalen, the repentant thief on the cross, St Peter ... to name but a few. People who found themselves in difficult situations, or disadvantaged, or on the wrong side of the tracks. God helped them at different points in history and He offers His help to us today. Being the recipients of such saving help both challenges and encourages us to be more compassionate and tolerant towards others – all contributory ingredients towards a deeper union and communion with each other. We learn that humble lesson, like the revered Carlo Carretto, who once said: *I am old enough to know that I am no better than others*. We may need to learn that lesson repeatedly.

St Paul reminds us that in Christ we see the Saviour of all people – both Jew and pagan. How indeed could Christ operate in any other way? In the Gospels we see Him as the very epitome of inclusiveness, the healer of the broken, the bearer of Good News, the forgiver of enemies, the life-giver to the dead. Christ embraces us when we are excluded, holds us when we give up, believes in us when we lose faith, hopes in us when we despair, loves us when we succumb to fear and hatred. Our weak drops of faith, hope and love are cherished and absorbed in the ocean of Christ's eternal faith, hope and love.

Matthew's Gospel urges us to ongoing conversion and not to be complacent or become complacent. Yes, we are a mixture of hypocrisy and integrity, sinner and saint, wolf and lamb, viper and infant. That mixture may have small or huge imbalances. But, whatever our personal circumstances, we place all our hopes and fears in God – like the good people in ancient scripture. *God can raise children from our stones*, healers from our wounds, wheat from our chaff, fruitfulness from our barrenness. Yes, the kingdom of God is indeed very near. It is all around us and within each of us – visible and invisible. Advent is a timely reminder of God's faithful persistent love for us, as revealed in Christ. It is a season of great expectations. Expectations that God promises to full-fill – well beyond our wildest dreams!

I conclude with a prayer from Joyce Rupp: *God of hope, come! Enter into this heart of mine which often loses itself in self, missing the message of your encouragement before I am so entangled in the web of my own whirl of life. Enable me not to lose sight of the power of your presence or the truth of your consolation*. My dear sisters and brothers, may the Lord give you peace.

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