

FIRST READING: Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

The way of the just is smooth; the path of the just you make level. Yes, for your way and your judgments, O LORD, we look to you; Your name and your title are the desire of our souls. My soul yearns for you in the night, yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you; When your judgment dawns upon the earth, the world's inhabitants learn justice. O LORD, you mete out peace to us, for it is you who have accomplished all we have done. O LORD, oppressed by your punishment, we cried out in anguish under your chastising. As a woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pains, so were we in your presence, O LORD. We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth to wind; Salvation we have not achieved for the earth, the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth. But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust. For your dew is a dew of light, and the land of shades gives birth.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 102:13-14ab and 15, 16-18, 19-21

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

You, O LORD, abide forever, and your name through all generations. You will arise and have mercy on Zion, for it is time to pity her. For her stones are dear to your servants, and her dust moves them to pity.

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

The nations shall revere your name, O LORD, and all the kings of the earth your glory, When the LORD has rebuilt Zion and appeared in his glory; When he has regarded the prayer of the destitute, and not despised their prayer.

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Let this be written for the generation to come, and let his future creatures praise the LORD: "The LORD looked down from his holy height, from heaven he beheld the earth, To hear the groaning of the prisoners, to release those doomed to die."

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Gospel:

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 14th Thursday of the Year II

Hosea switched between singular and plural in his prophecy. He also mentioned two different names; Israel and Ephraim. Israel was one of the Patriarchs, AKA Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham. Ephraim was the younger son of Joseph, son of Jacob/Israel. Israel was the Northern Kingdom of the Jewish people. Ephraim was one of the ten tribes that settled there. Hosea used the image of the singular people for the collective nation. God was the one who raised a people for God because of the covenant forged with Abraham. "I will make of you a great nation." God

also led the people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. God was the source of blessing to these people who have seemed to forget about God, God's gifts and God's very presence in the lives of God's people.

Yet God wished to show mercy rather than anger. This did not prevent Israel from being overrun, defeated and carried off into servitude and Diaspora. This shows that God intended to remain faithful to God's people despite the people's infidelity to God. God went with the Israelis to lead, guide and nourish them as people of faith. The Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom never came to an official end, though today's Samaritans in Israel believe that they are the remnant who came home. Through the destruction of Israel, today's Judaism is a world religion.

God remained with God's people in their suffering. God's mercy did not prevent catastrophe. But God's mercy led to healing of their broken hearts and led them to world prominence. This is a good lesson for us as we face the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. God accompanies us in every step of our journey through this life and in what ever we confront. God has never left the Jewish people and God will never leave us alone.

Who has ever seen God face to face? A few; Adam, Eve, Abraham and Moses. Jesus, of course; he is God. But the rest of us; how do we see God? In the beauty of creation. In the wonder of human life. In the eyes of those we love. Even in our worst enemy and those we can't stand. All of creation can sing the glory of God. All people live in the image and likeness of God. Every event of our lives can become a moment to glimpse God's face, for God is reflected in all God's creation. God is always near us and a mere thought away.

Who are these Apostles? They are the twelve Disciples whom Jesus has just sent on Mission to preach, teach and heal. Jesus gave them their mission and sent them on their way with some advice. They received their faith in Jesus as God's gift; a grace. In fulfilling their mission, they share their gift with others. They travel on foot with no money, food, change of clothes, no walking stick and barefoot. Why such abject poverty? They are living witnesses to God's providence. The good people they meet are the means for God to provide. Somehow the Apostles' poverty allows people to respond to them. In receiving the gospel of the Kingdom, they offer support to the ones who preach. The Church still operates in a similar manner. We do take up a collection each week to pay the bills.

The real radical part of this gospel is the approach to people. In offering peace and invitation to faith to residents of a town, they in turn offer back hospitality sharing God's peace back. Both the apostles and the people come to know God in the sharing of peace. That's how Jesus advised them to act in success. But failure was an option too. Jesus advised the twelve not to take any failure as personal. They were to unburden themselves of rejection with a simple gesture. Shake the dust from their feet and move to another town. This action was for the preacher and not against those who could not come to faith. God would deal with them. God's mercy is infinite toward sinners and God shares God's gifts in God's own time and way.

For us, we may not like people to disagree with us or reject us; but they do. How best can we rely on God's infinite, eternal and unconditional compassion and mercy? We can first remember God's love for us and use the presence of God to listen better to others. Other

people don't have to be wrong for you and me to be right. We are all God's beloved children. God loves those with whom we disagree. We can discover God's presence within them and place them into God's embrace. Shaking the dust of disagreement and hurt is a way for us to forgive; the burden of anger is always ours.

May we always be aware of how God provides.

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