

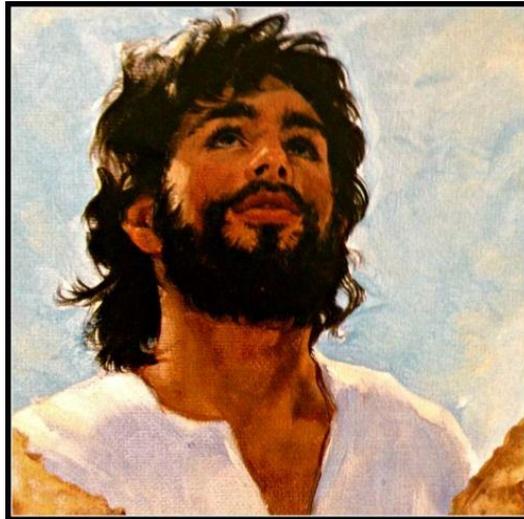
# Reflections on Sunday's Readings: December 8, 2019

Second Sunday of Advent [A]

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Romans 15: 4-9

Matthew 3: 1-12



## *“Spirit-filled Messiah”*

### **Introduction**

The first reading today from Isaiah offers us a beautiful vision of the Messiah, the anointed leader to come from David's line, who will bring about the fully realized “Kingdom of God” here on earth and to come. This Spirit-filled leader in the Book of Isaiah is so filled with the Spirit of God and God's virtues that there is a unity of the Messiah and God's own self. This is the Son of God who is full of holy wisdom and insight. This is God with us.

### **He looks into our hearts and into our eyes**

This “anointed leader” will look into the hearts and the eyes of the poor and the weak, and he will lift them up. He will look into the hearts and the eyes of the violent and those bent on evil, and he will touch them and turn their hearts toward righteousness and truth. This is indeed good news. In the midst of today's talk about truth and falsehoods, we know there is One from whom all of creation flows that is full of truth, goodness, and justice. This “Beloved One,” whom the Messiah makes real, will restore us and ground us in **justice, holiness, and truth.**

### **Harmony between humanity and creation**

The harmony between humanity and all of creation, broken by sin, will be restored by the Messianic leader now and to come. Harmony and peace will be established throughout the

whole cosmos. This is **what God dreams** for us and what God is deeply at work accomplishing in us and in the world through the Son, the Christ, and through all who are **awake** and **attune** to what God is hoping for and doing for us.

### **Today's Gospel story in Matthew**

Powerfully then, we hear in the Gospel today from Matthew that this “kingdom of heaven” has drawn near. It is at hand! It is beginning! The Messiah, the Spirit-filled leader, the Son of God, is among us! Thus, it is time to awaken, to repent, to change our hearts and become receptive of God’s Spirit and dreams. It is time to become a part of the remedy and the remaking of the human family and the earth!

### **Our human vulnerability**

Most of us are aware of our weaknesses. We know we are not all we could be as a son or daughter of God. We are not all we could be for others. We are not all we could be in terms of our best selves or our true selves. We are always growing and changing. We often take two or three steps forward in our spiritual lives or our human integration, and then we take one or two steps backward. So we can feel these words of John the Baptist about “repenting” and taking on a new mindset, a new heart.

We also know “anger” in our human lives so a word like “wrath” resonates with us, and we can begin to be afraid about being judged. We need to watch being hooked here by these images. The Day of the Lord, the Day of the Messiah, is not so much about judgement as it is about restoration and healing.

John’s expectations about the Messiah and the Day of the Lord were about “setting things right,” but he expected that this “setting of things right” would also include something like flattening those oppressing him and others. There is some “self-righteousness,” maybe even some vindictiveness, in John here as he slams the Pharisees and Sadducees. You “brood of vipers” is a pretty strong statement. It is important at times to challenge and confront oppressors and those doing evil and are harming others, especially the innocent; but we also must watch getting caught up in this anger and moving into self-righteousness and wrath.

Have you ever gotten up on your “high horse”? I have, yes ... “mea culpa”. This is what John is getting caught up in here.

### **Biblical justice**

But justice in the Scriptures, one of the Hebrew words here is “**sedeqah**,” means most of all restoring someone who has gotten off the path to the right path. It is as if our main aisle here is the spiritual path of holiness and goodness, and someone begins to go off way to the side here. A person who is concerned about justice will bring the person back to the proper path. This is “restorative justice,” and this is the kind of justice God is always about with us.

God ever looks into our eyes inviting us to wholeness and holiness. We know when someone looks at us with this kind of mercy and loving-kindness, we want to let go of our faults and

mistakes, our defenses and our falsehoods. We want to walk into mercy and begin afresh. This is what God is about with us. God's justice is not about vengeance but about "setting things right" in terms of **restoring God's original dreams for us.**

Jesus the Messiah comes with the Holy Spirit and fire, a passionate and compassionate love, to free us and renew us in the image of our son-ship and daughterhood! This is our Messiah. This is the Spirit-filled leader, who companions us personally and communally to know and live in God's goodness, beauty, and truth.

### **Conclusion**

We have been baptized and confirmed in Jesus the Christ. We share in the abundance of the Holy Spirit of the Messiah, our Spirit-filled and servant leader.

We can also remember the insights of several mystics in our Christian tradition when they say: 'Jesus has no hands but our hands now. He has no feet but our feet. The Messiah has no eyes but our eyes now.'

Finally, this week at our retreat committee meeting one of the members offered this insight into hope. This member sees "**hope**" now as **a knowing in the heart** of God's forever love and presence with us. It is '**a "heart-knowing"** that God's love and presence are with me all of my life.'

With these thoughts in our hearts, let us hear once again several lines from the Letter to the Romans (*The Revised New Jerusalem Bible translation*):

*"Each of us should please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the community ...."*  
(Rom 15: 2-3)

*"May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you all the same purpose."*  
(Rom 15: 5)

*"Accept one another, then, as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God."* (Rom 15: 17)

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your believing, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."* (Rom 15: 13)

This is another gift that God wants to give us this Advent and Christmas: the gift of **hope**.

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