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Teaching the **FAITH**

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“All the way to heaven is heaven”

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December 7, 2025—2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 11.1-10; Romans 15.4-9; Matthew 3.1-12

The readings for the Second Sunday of Advent remind us of a fundamental truth of the spiritual life: God’s salvific work does not depend on human strength or political power. Rather, through the transforming action of the Holy Spirit, He brings forth a radically new order of justice and peace beyond anything we can imagine. In this new creation, the promises to the patriarchs are confirmed and the whole earth is “filled with knowledge of the LORD” (Isa 11.9), as even the Gentiles “glorify God for his mercy” (Rom 15.9).

A New Dispensation of the Spirit

Let us begin with the familiar prophecy of the shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse, an image representing a new beginning to the idolatrous Davidic kingdom, which has been cut down on account of its sinfulness. Despite the failure of Israel’s kings to remain faithful to the covenant, the LORD promises to raise up a “shoot” who will “judge the poor with justice and decide aright for the land’s afflicted” (Isa 11.4), thus embodying the ideal of Davidic kingship (see Ps 72). Yet, unlike the kings who came before him, this messianic ruler will be anointed with the sevenfold spirit of the LORD, who “shall rest upon him” (Isa 11.2). Endowed with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the LORD, he “shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked” (Isa 11.4). As Origin observes in his *Homilies on Numbers*, this plenitude of gifts indicates that the Holy Spirit will rest upon the messiah “in an excessive degree and in a completely different way” than the Hebrew prophets and kings, in whom He operated only “when it was expedient for them” and “useful to those to whom He was ministering.” In other words, this new beginning of the Davidic kingdom is not merely a restoration of the old covenant, but the inauguration of a new dispensation of the Spirit—one that establishes a new covenant and, ultimately, a creation restored to its original harmony.

This becomes even clearer in the second part of the reading, as the focus shifts from the messianic ruler to the peaceable kingdom that he will establish. Isaiah writes:

[T]he wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,

and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.
The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. (Isa 11.6-8)

The imagery in this passage is clearly meant to evoke the state of the world prior to the fall, when the first man and woman lived in harmony with “all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals” (Gen 2.20). The peaceful coexistence even of carnivores with their natural prey highlights the paradisaic character of the messianic kingdom. As Irenaeus writes in Book V of *Against Heresies*, “[I]t is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth.” On this reading, then, the description of the peaceable kingdom is indicative of how the natural order of animal domination typical of the present age will be fulfilled in an eschatological state of peace, where “there shall be no harm or ruin on all [God’s] holy mountain” (Isa 11.9).

The Communion of the Church

Yet, alongside this eschatological interpretation, theologians have sometimes discerned in this passage an allegorical description of the Church, the restored creation already taking shape within history. For example, in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, Thomas Aquinas draws a direct connection between the peaceful coexistence of naturally hostile animals and the unity spoken of by Paul in Colossians: “[T]here is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all” (Col 3.11). Just as natural enemies of the animal kingdom are reconciled under the rule of the messianic king, so too the Church unites peoples once divided by sin and the enmity between Jew and Gentile: “For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh” (Eph 2.14).

On this reading, then, the peaceable kingdom of Isaiah 11 signifies the communion of the Church, in which all nations find a home—much like Noah’s ark, as Aquinas goes on to observe. He further explains that the “little child” who guides the animals represents none other than “Peter the fisherman,” who—despite his weakness and humble origins—has been chosen by God “to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1.27) and shepherd the flock of Christ. The image of the animals feeding and resting together evokes, for St. Thomas, the liturgical life of the Church, in which Christians of every race feast “on the same food of the Word of God” and “the food of the sacraments.” In this way, Isaiah’s prophecy not only points toward the eschatological restoration of creation, but also discloses the mystery of the Church as the beginning of that renewal in the present age.

While this allegorical reading of Isaiah 11 as an image of the Church is undeniably beautiful, it is also challenging. In a world often marked by violence and domination, where the powerful subdue the weak with seemingly little repercussion, it often requires great faith to confess with John the Baptist that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt 3.2). Like King Ahaz, who sought security through a treaty with Assyria instead of trusting in the promises of the LORD (thus prompting Isaiah to speak of the “stump” of Jesse), we too are often tempted to rely on human strength or political power to accomplish what we might believe to be the plans of God. Yet Isaiah reminds us that the true restoration of creation comes about not through worldly strategizing, but from the One whose mere breath will “slay the wicked” (Isa 11.4) and who will baptize not merely with water but “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3.11). In a world longing for justice, we are called to place our trust not in princes, but in the promise that “by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15.4).

As Christians, we rightly live in hopeful anticipation of an eschatological future, when all wrongs will be made right and creation restored to its original harmony. Yet we are also invited to view the present with the eyes of faith, discerning in the mystery of the Church a real foretaste of that eternal future. While there will come a day of judgment when the LORD will “clear his threshing floor,” “gather his wheat into his barn,” and “burn [the chaff] with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3.12), there is also a real sense in which this judgment is already underway: “Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3.10). Reflecting on this dual aspect of divine judgment and salvation, Pope Benedict XVI writes that, “the truth of a man that judgment renders definitive is that truth which has emerged as the fundamental orientation of his existence in all the pathways of his life” (*Eschatology*, 209). Or, as Catherine of Siena once put it, “all the way to heaven is heaven.”

Thus, as we conclude these reflections on the readings for this Second Sunday of Advent, we are reminded that eternal life is not something alien to our temporal existence, but rather its complete fulfillment available even now in the life of the Church: “This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (John 17:3).

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For Further Reading

Irenaeus, [*Against Heresies*](#)

John Paul II, [*Dominum et vivificantem*](#)

Origen, [*Homilies on Numbers*](#)

Origen, [*Homilies on Isaiah*](#)

Thomas Aquinas, [*Commentary on Isaiah*](#)

In Short . . .

- ***Salvation and justice come through the transforming action of the Holy Spirit, not political strength or worldly strategies***
- ***While Isaiah’s image of the peaceable kingdom is evocative of Eden and points to an eschatological state of peace where creation is restored to its original harmony, it is also a figure of the Church***
- ***In a world marked by injustice, Christians are invited to trust God’s promises, live in anticipation of the final restoration, and recognize eternal life already present in the life of the Church.***