

1st Sunday of Advent, Cycle C
Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36
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"I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land." With these words, the prophet Jeremiah is announcing to God's conquered and scattered people, the advent of righteousness and justice. In scripture, righteousness and justice are almost synonymous. They are two words referring to a single idea: the idea of a right relationship with God. Because they turned away from God, the chosen people had to endure exile in Babylon. There they learned that without God, they *were* nothing, and could *do* nothing. Jeremiah brought them the good news that their future could still be assured, if only they would embrace righteousness and justice. In other words, if only they would get right with God.

As Christians we recognize that Jesus Christ is the 'shoot of David' whose advent Jeremiah proclaimed. The challenge that Jeremiah placed before the ancient people of God, is put to *us* by Christ. He calls us to put aside our selfish, misguided pre-occupations, and embrace a relationship with God that is just and proper and true. But characteristically, Christ doesn't just set us a task. He does the job for us. Justice is primarily God's work, before it is our work. God has put us right with God through Jesus Christ.

Love for each other is the best proof of our commitment to do all that is right and just. Thus St. Paul's wish for the Thessalonians holds

true for us too: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all." As Catholics, our love for one another is manifested in, and enhanced by, a deeply satisfying pattern of life, rooted in the teaching of the Church. The sacraments of confession and communion make life livable, bearable, even at the darkest moments, because this is where we experience the loving and consoling presence of Jesus himself. The sacraments enable us to stand up straight and raise our heads, confident that Christ is near at hand. Our prayer, as a community, and when we are alone with God, helps us make sense of things, even the most perplexing things, and deepens our feeling for God, and our trust.

All over the world, on this First Sunday of Advent, candidates for baptism are being invited to bear the gentle yoke of Christ. Our experience is that without that yoke we *are* nothing and can *do* nothing. It acts for us like a gyroscope, or like the long pole carried by a tightrope walker. It helps us keep balanced, and oriented toward God, who is our destination. Because we claim the saving power of God's justice in our lives, we must bring the power of God's justice to others by our words and deeds. Aware of our own fallibility and sinfulness, we nevertheless share our tradition with others; not with condescension, but with humility, because it is the most precious thing we possess.

St. Paul prayed, "May the Lord increase you." Today we are increased, as countless new people formally start their journey of faith with us. I say 'formally,' because informally it has already begun. They've made their own enquiries and contacts; their instruction is well under way. They already have a sense of Jesus keeping them company, guiding their steps and their minds. But today the Church says, "Welcome. It's nice to

have you." We hope their journey will lead them to Easter night, and full communion with us in the Faith. Today we embrace them as companions on the way. Like us, they want to be right with God, and in the words of our Gospel, "to stand secure before the Son of Man."