

Readings for August 7, 2024: Isaias 11:1-9; Matthew 5:1-11

Reflection by: Joan Mumaw, IHM

The reading from the prophet Isaiah today follows upon readings where God has stricken down the Assyrians at the Jerusalem Gate. God, through the prophet, announces the raising of a king from David's line who, filled with the Spirit, will inaugurate a period of justice, peace and harmony with all of creation. He will be filled with wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord. All the gifts that we are blessed with at Pentecost. Justice and faithfulness will mark his reign. He will advocate for the poor and those needing protection.

The characterization of this reign is known in Hebrew as Shalom. Shalom is who the Creator is – the one God, dwelling in harmony, mutuality and deference toward each other and the whole of creation. Shalom embodies wholeness, completeness and love— it is/ as described in this reading: “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb— the cow and the bear shall feed and their young lie down together. They shall not hurt nor destroy— for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.” If we read further, we see God “offering an outstretched hand to the remnants and outcasts and gathering the dispersed from the four corners of the earth.”

Christians use the term kingdom or kingdom of God for this interconnectedness and interdependency of all things and primacy of community. Jesus references this Shalom and calls his disciples to model the peaceable kingdom, one not based on power and wealth, but on service to the poor and oppressed. Pope Francis calls the Church to be a field hospital for the poor, oppressed and suffering of our world.

My own experience in both Africa and Latin America indicates that governmental leadership based on power, corruption and wealth is at the root of conflict, environmental degradation and humanitarian disasters. The current conflict in Sudan pits the Sudanese army, which owns many corporations and profits from minerals, against the Rapid Support Forces, which owns the gold mines and is responsible for genocide against the people of Darfur. It is the people who are displaced, the women and girls who are raped and the children who are now victims of famine. Leadership in service of the poor and oppressed is nowhere to be seen.

We could replicate this story many times over and need to ask, during our own election season: are we electing leaders who will serve the people, especially the poor and oppressed, or are we electing leaders who are owned by corporate America and interested only in furthering the wealthy class?

The authority of the Hebrew Torah now rests with the Jesus, the Christ. The Beatitudes, which we read from Matthew's Gospel, is the Constitution of the Kingdom. They are the central teachings of Jesus to which, early on in his ministry, he is instructing his disciples.

The poor refers both to those suffering economic hardship and also those who leave all to follow Jesus, being dependent on the Spirit residing in the community. Saturday, we witnessed this in action as Jane Aseltyne vowed poverty - to share all in common with us as a community as we together strive to "be and become the liberating mission of Jesus' for our world.

This week in prayer we are focusing on being peacemakers whom Jesus called "blessed." Being a peacemaker is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to be a reconciling presence in the face of unrest and injustice. To be a reconciling presence is to help restore right relationship.

We as IHMs, in our mission statement, "choose to work with others to build a culture of peace and right relationship among ourselves, with the Church and the whole Earth Community". We have opportunities every day to be a reconciling presence as we relate to each other, to the staff and those we meet within and beyond the campus.

Reconciliation is never more needed than in our time. We are called to be bridge-builders, reaching across divides to connect and unite with others in work and in play. We need to try to understand where people are coming from. What is their experience? Why do they believe as they do? Responses, both positive and negative, are rooted in our life experience. We need to spend time reflecting on our own lived experience and how it impacts who we are, how we act and what we say, how we respond to what we hear? The political culture in today's world, both the US and abroad, saturates all aspects of life. Can we find common ground?

We are missionary disciples by our Baptism, until the day we die. The Mission is God's mission. God has the Church; God has IHM and God has you and me. We are called daily to live the liberating Mission of Jesus. And as stated in our Chapter Direction Statement, "Each of our stories writes the narrative of IHM, unfolding again and again the charism, especially in spaces longing for Liberation. Together, we dare, we risk and we dream the unfolding of the kingdom of God.