

Human Acts Reveal Grace

Isaiah presents a promise of divine goodness expressed in human acts, a vision of joy that gives hope. A human Messiah will come, “a shoot...from the stump of Jesse.” The “spirit of the LORD” will be visible in him through behavior which reveals what today we call the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude and fear of the Lord. Divine power will be evident in the fruit of the Messiah’s mission: The wolf shall live with the lamb; “they will not hurt or destroy...for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Grace will be visible.

John the Baptizer holds out the same hope and gives the same message, but his emphasis is different. He focuses on what we should do to let the grace and power of God appear in our lives: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.... Bear fruit worthy of repentance.... Every tree...that does not bear good fruit is cut down.” John calls people to express their response in human actions by being baptized and confessing their sins. He expresses his own faith by dressing in camel skins and living on locusts and wild honey.

What John shows us is Jesus impacting our lives like a meteor smacking into a planet. “The Messiah is here! The Reign of God is at hand! Wake up! Change! Get moving! Do something about it!” John believes in our ability to choose and respond, in the importance of our making human choices and acting on them. John presents Jesus Christ as the one who comes to bring us to life, to spark us into action. Jesus’ coming stimulates and activates our human powers.

But all is not human action here. John boldly an-

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2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9;
Matthew 3:1-12

nounces the action of God: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The “fruitful tree” is not the person who performs good acts, but the one who performs divine acts. Like the fruit of Mary’s womb, the fruit of our lives must be divine—the fruit of the Holy Spirit acting within us, acting through our human actions.

Jesus is God made man: fully human and fully divine. We who are the Body of Christ on earth are called to be fully human and fully divine in every-

thing we do—by letting God, who dwells within us and anoints us with divine grace, be reflected in everything we do. We live the life of grace; we grow in grace by letting it express itself in and through our human actions. We grow in faith by letting our faith in Christ’s teachings reveal itself in our lifestyle. We grow in hope by letting hope in Christ’s promises

guide our choices. We grow in love by letting our love for God take flesh in all our words and actions.

Saint Paul teaches that the source of our unity as a community is our common effort and encouragement

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of each other to live out what we believe. We will neither always agree on what we should do nor succeed in doing it; but if we have patience and encourage one another, we will be able to live in harmony “in accordance with Christ Jesus.”

To accept our humanness means accepting ourselves as imperfect and incomplete yet intended to grow toward perfection. Jesus, the shoot growing up from the “stump of Jesse,” represents God’s power acting in human events; this gives us hope (see Romans 14:1-15:13).

Paul’s practical advice is to read Scripture. “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” In Scripture God expresses to us divine truth in human words. By making human efforts to understand God’s human words, we grow in union with God. Then God’s grace will be visible in us.

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

Second Week of Advent

***Pray daily:** Lord, you came to share completely in our human condition except for sin. Give me a desire to share completely in your divine life. Draw me to study your mind and heart. Amen.*

Monday: Luke 1:26-38 (Immaculate Conception). “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The Immaculate Conception requires us to believe that human beings have a part to play in redeeming the world. Is there anything new God is calling you to that you’ve been afraid to say ‘yes’ to?

Tuesday: Matthew 18:12-14. “If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?” Do you know any Christian who feels alienated from the Christian com-

munity? What can you do to show that person God’s love, concern and invitation?

Wednesday: Matthew 11:28-30. “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Is it a crushing burden to try to live on God’s level in all we do? What makes it light?

Thursday: Matthew 11:11-15. “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” What have we received from God that is greater than anything we could receive from our greatest efforts at prayer and fasting?

Friday: Luke 1:38-47 (Our Lady of Guadalupe). Elizabeth cried out, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” How are you blessed? How does your life bear divine fruit?

Saturday: Matthew 17:10-13. “I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him.” What things are happening in the Church that you might not recognize as God’s divine action?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: When the water is added to the wine at Mass, ask God to join your humanity to Jesus’ divinity, totally and intimately.

As Disciple: Put a copy of the Bible in some visible place at home or at work to remind you to live out in daily life what you believe.

As Prophet: Each day this week make one choice that is a conscious, deliberate response to something Jesus said or did.

As Priest: Make a list of principles drawn from Jesus’ teaching that really are a unifying rule of life in your family or circle of friends.

As King: Ask what fruit you have borne for the Kingdom of God in your professional, social and family life.