

Reflection for Saturday 5 December

Several of the first readings at the weekday Masses in Advent come from the prophecy of Isaiah. They contain references to the coming of the messiah and the change that will come about in the lives of the people of Judah as a result of his coming.

Isaiah was writing in the 8th century when Israel was going through a turbulent time. The northern part of the kingdom had been devastated by the Assyrian armies. Many of the people had been taken from their land and homes into exile in Assyria. Now in the southern part of the kingdom referred to in the Old Testament as Judah, these Assyrian armies were attacking Jerusalem and the people there would suffer the same fate as those of the north.

The prophet proclaims to the people what God is saying and doing in all this upheaval. Isaiah says that the reason for what is happening is because the people are so far away from God. Their lives no longer reflect the God who had brought them out of Egypt. Their worship is shallow and filled with empty ritual. They behave as if God did not exist at all. They are only interested in themselves, making money by whatever means possible, creating luxury, whilst the poor are neglected and they became richer.

God was now punishing them for their wickedness by allowing the Assyrians to invade and destroy the land and eventually carry the people off into exile. In the end that happened but not in Isaiah's time.

But the prophet's message is not all doom and gloom. He sees a time when God would restore the land to its former glory because the people have turned from their evil ways and have allowed God to come into their lives and their worship would now reflect the right relationship of God to his people. This would be the age of the Messiah, whom God would raise up to lead the people in the ways of righteousness. It would also have an effect on nature. In chapter 11 Isaiah says "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" vs 6. The messianic age would see the people as ensign to the peoples of the nations around Israel.

Today's first reading describes how God would undo all the destruction of the land and how it become productive again. The land would be even more beautiful, and the sun and the moon would be brighter than now. What a change.

All this is looking forward to the time when the Messiah would come. Advent is that time when we look back to how God prepared his people for Jesus the Messiah and how we now must prepare as we look back and at the same time look forward to when Christ will come again in glory.

Let Isaiah's message stir our hearts and so make us ready to welcome our Lord into our lives.

Roger Watson