

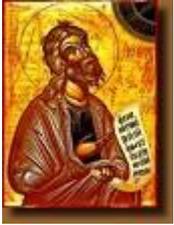
Lord, strengthen the weak, save the lives of the poor, rescue the oppressed!

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17

Rom 15:4-9

Matt 3:1-12



In the first reading Isaiah speaks of the One to come upon whom the spirit of the Lord rests. This spirit brings understanding, wisdom, counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. His words will strike the ruthless and slay the wicked and he does not judge by appearances and hearsay. There will come a time when the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord. The ideal such as friendship between a wolf and lamb is important because it reminds us of our imperfect world and a goal to strive for even though we may not attain it.

The Psalmist speaks of the king who governs with justice and brings right judgment to the afflicted. He rescues the lives of the poor and has pity upon the lowly and the poor and is the agent of Yahweh who exercises divine judgment. The king's justice does not simply involve impartial decisions but is such that it strongly upholds the rights of the oppressed.

In the second reading Paul tells the Romans of the usefulness of scripture; it is written for our instruction, a guide through which we can receive hope, patience, and encouragement. It tells us how Jesus came as the servant of the Jews and how his coming fulfills the promises of the patriarchs. The Jewish minority is encouraged to accept the Gentile majority so that together they can glorify the Father of all.

In the Gospel John the Baptist preaches of the need to reform our lives. He is "a herald's voice crying out in the desert," telling the people of the greater One to come, the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.



With one voice we glorify the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And receive the Holy Spirit as our guide.

Prepare the Way of the Lord

John's message from Yahweh was simply that "the Kingdom of God" is at hand and the Messiah is coming to baptize in fire and Spirit. John was firm in encouraging repentance, a first step towards complete reconciliation with God, but many of the religious leaders simply found his message "curious" and did not take it to heart whereas the ordinary persons found it a powerful idea. John wanted a religious person to be kind hearted and always trustworthy. The powerful of the time were proud of their race and social standing and were smug about believing themselves religious. To John, they were a "generation of vipers" stinging each other to spiritual death.

It is prophesied by Isaiah that the One to come judges not according to superficial values. He will bring to the whole world knowledge of the Lord, knowledge as encompassing as waters which cover the seas. Sacred Scripture is a powerful source of faith, hope and many graces and is written for our benefit, for our instruction. Do we attentively listen to the readings, meditate upon them and let their lessons soak into our very beings?

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