

Social Justice Homily Notes: (Yr.A) Second Sunday of Advent
December 9, 2007

Introduction

One of the phrases used to justify participation in the First World War was it was “the war to end all wars”; history has shown this did not happen; many historians argue the peace settlement of 1919 created the conditions which led to the outbreak of the Second World War; yet, there is a desire for a lasting peace among both individuals and nations; the problem is how to achieve it

Scripture Texts

In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist preaches, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near”;

by doing so, he indicates the need to change our thinking in order to achieve the peace we desire

During Isaiah’s lifetime, Judah was involved in many armed conflicts with its neighbors; Isaiah’s ideal of a perfect and lasting peace among nations (symbolized by the animals) based upon a full knowledge of the Lord must have seemed impossible; yet, without this vision, it could never be realized; a key element required for attaining this peace was a leader committed to establishing social conditions based upon divine justice; this included protecting the rights of the meek and poor; establishing justice might require the use of force to make the conditions for peace possible (“he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with his breath he shall kill the wicked”)

John the Baptist also lived during a time when the creation of a just and lasting peace seemed unlikely; order was enforced by the Roman army; protests against the heavy taxes imposed upon the local population or offenses against Jewish religious traditions were violently suppressed; the Pharisees and Sadducees burdened the ordinary people with extra religious obligations; the ideal presented by Isaiah centuries earlier still held out hope for the people; John preached the arrival of this righteous leader would change everything; his divine power would establish justice and destroy evil; the Kingdom of God, with its promise of lasting peace, was near; yet, the message of this individual would only be heard by those who were ready for it; repentance meant giving up past claims to power and other desires which lead to sin (selfishness, greed, hatred etc.); a just and lasting peace required a willingness as individuals and groups to follow God’s law

Application

As the Church teaches, peace is not merely “the absence of war” nor “the maintenance of a balance of power among enemies” but requires “the establishment of an order based on justice and charity” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine #494); although states have a right to defend themselves against attack, force must be used only after all other means of settling a dispute have been tried and be proportionate (Compendium of the Social Doctrine #500); working for peace is an expression of Christian faith and requires a new way of approaching others (Compendium of the Social Doctrine #516); peace comes from forgiveness and reconciliation (Compendium of the Social Doctrine #517) which requires the creation of just conditions (Compendium of the Social Doctrine #518)

As citizens, we can work towards establishing peace by examining whether our nation's foreign policy and use of military force does create more just conditions around the world; we can look at our attitudes towards other ethnic, religious or cultural groups and if necessary change them so as to create a culture of peace within our country which supplies an example to the world; we can avoid the temptation to become cynical and believe lasting peace is impossible; finally, we can as people of faith pray that God guide us towards a lasting and just peace in our world.