Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 1, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“I will come and cure him” (Matt 8:6).

Isaiah 4:2-6; Matt 8:5-11

As we begin Advent, the Lectionary will provide many scripture readings that explore and emphasize the mystery of the Incarnation. If God is coming into the world, it is for everyone, even those once accounted “outsiders.” When Jesus is approached by a Roman centurion, someone who is, strictly speaking, both a pagan and an enemy of Israel in his role as an officer in the imperial occupation, Jesus does not turn him away. He immediately agrees to go with the man to his house to heal his servant.

The centurion is aware of the strict rules regarding a Jew entering the house of a pagan, and he tries to dissuade Jesus of the need to “come under my roof.” He reasons that because Jesus has real authority over illness, he does not need to enter the house and lay his hands on the servant. He is in charge, even as the centurion himself is in charge of his soldiers. If he just says the word, his subordinates will do what he says.

Jesus praises the centurion for his faith, saying it is greater than all the faith he has found among the Israelites. This remark gives Matthew the message of this story for his readers. Salvation is not just for the Jewish people; it is the pagans as well. Everyone is now included among the Chosen People. The Incarnation means that God is present within all people, transforming all humanity with a new future — divine life with God.

This is Good News to the Gentiles and something of a surprise to some of Jesus' contemporaries, including the strict members of Sanhedrin and the high priests. For them, there was no salvation outsde the Chosen People. For us today, at a time of increasing sectarianism and claims by militant Christians and exclusivist Catholics that only certain people will be saved, the universal message of Christmas is challenging. It declares a fundamental equality in love and that divine mercy encompasses everyone. It also tells us to embrace everyone as beloved by God.

Even on this first Monday of Advent we can anticipate the song of the angels to the shepherds on Christmas: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all people of good will.” Welcome to Advent.

Advertisement