Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Let us walk in the light of the LORD!” (Isa 2:5).

Isa 2:5; Matt 8:5-11

Today’s readings contain two very familiar sentences. The first is from Isaiah 2:4, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” It is part of an inscription on a wall at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. The second we say at every Mass before receiving Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul (servant) shall be healed.” What connects the two quotes thematically is that Isaiah’s vision of world peace resonates with the story of a Roman centurion humbly acknowledging Jesus’ authority to heal his servant remotely.

The centurion is in charge of 100 soldiers, and his authority, in person or implicit in any order sent down to his subordinates, must be obeyed.. He knows that the first thing a soldier learns is the chain of command and his duty to obey an order. The centurion recognizes this same authority in Jesus, but also that his is far superior because it is over life and death. The centurion calls him Lord, because Jesus is at the top of the chain of command and his word carries absolute power to accomplish what he orders.

Illness, like demonic possession, was regarded in Jesus' time as the work of an evil spirit. When Jesus drives out an unclean spirit that is making someone sick, or when he frees a possessed person, the crowds are more awe-struck than just amazed because they have witnessed a divine intervention, the power of God present in Jesus. Likewise, the peace Jesus gives is more than worldly peace, a truce between combatants. It gives total rest, wholeness at the soul-level.

Jesus praises the centurion for his faith because he understands that Jesus is not just a healer or broker of calm in a conflict. He is Lord. Jesus praises him in the same way he will praise Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13-20) for recognizing that he is more than a prophet. He is the Christ of God. Jesus laments that he has not found this kind of faith in Israel, but he rejoices to find it in this foreigner, even an unwanted member of the Roman occupation. God is pouring out faith freely on outsiders, like the Syrophoenecian woman beyond the border who begs Jesus to heal her sick daughter (Matt 15:22-28).

Advent invites us to deepen our faith in the One who is coming and has the authority to bring healing and freedom to us. By his Incarnation, Jesus previews for us the fullness of our own humanity created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus is the new Adam who reveals the new creation. By welcoming him we recover our true selves and our divine destiny. What Isaiah foretold on the mountain of the Lord will be revealed. Wars will cease, the nations of the earth with sit down together at the banquet of the Lord. God's sovereignty will rule over all as justice and love restore peace and harmony. This must be our vision and commitment as well.

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