

First Sunday of Advent

Romans 10:9-18

Psalm 19:8-11

Mt 4:18-22

In his 1954 novel, *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding tells the story of a group of British schoolboys marooned on a deserted island after their plane is shot down over the Pacific.

Without adult supervision, the boys, at the outset, are able to pull together and manage some self-government.

However, their life together becomes violent when one of them decides to set up his own hunting tribe in opposition to the others.

Those who resist joining his tribe are murdered one by one.

At the end of the novel, the boys have set the whole island on fire in their attempts to flush out of hiding and kill the last holdout, Ralph.

The fire alerts a naval officer who lands on the beach just as the boys are about to close in on their last victim.

At the sight of grown-ups, the horror of their savage behavior becomes clear to the boys, shame descends on them and they burst into tears.

With the appearance of the adults, the civilized world breaks into their world of chaos and reveals the awful truth of their actions.

We begin the Advent season by reflecting on the eschaton, the last day, when the Son of Man will come to judge the living and the dead.

As Jesus describes it in today's Gospel, it will be much like the arrival of adults on the deserted island in William Golding's novel.

The truth of God's Word can no longer be refuted or denied and all people will either hold their heads up in joy or hang them in shame.

The intentions of our hearts and the quality of our actions will be laid bare by that glorious vision.



As individuals and a nations we will be called to give an account of our stewardship of creation. God's kingdom of love will break into our world to reveal whether we acted with justice and mercy, or whether we have instead trampled on the rights of the weak, stolen from the poor, and killed the innocent.

The thought of it is as harrowing as it is awesome.

And yet Jesus tells his disciples not to cower in fear but to stand straight and hold their heads up when they see these things because it means their redemption is near at hand.

The day of the Lord will not only bring judgment but salvation.

It will be the day when God's promises are fulfilled, when the hungry are fed and the meek inherit the earth.

It will be the day when justice is done for the poor and consolation is visited on those who mourn.

It will be the day when every tear will be wiped away, and we will see the God whose face we have yearned for.

In short, those who worked and longed for justice will have their day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the nations.

Justice can be said to be the unifying theme of all God's revelation—not justice as it is commonly understood as giving to others what they deserve, but biblical justice, which means being in a right relationship with God.

God did not treat us as our actions deserved, but sacrificed himself to forgive us.

Neither did he wait for us to turn back to him, but time and time again took the initiative to call us back.

As such, justice in its fullest sense is not something we can achieve merely by our own efforts.

Rather it is a gift of God who loved us and reconciled us to himself.

When we are first reconciled to him, then we can be reconciled to one another and, in that reconciliation, justice is realized.

There is no better example of the power and effectiveness of biblical justice than the civil rights movement in the United States under the leadership of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The forgiveness and non-violence he preached were not primarily planks of a political strategy but a result of the Gospel call to love one's enemy and to do good to those who hate.

If the civil rights movement had insisted on a merely human form of justice requiring vengeance on those who perpetrated crimes against blacks, then we would still be suffering widespread racial hatred and violence.

Instead, a justice based on reconciliation rather than vengeance made it possible for all races to at least begin learning to live, work, and worship together in peace.

It is a lesson we urgently need today as we face the challenges of the current financial crisis.

There is plenty of blame to go around with no lack of name calling, whether it be Wall Street “fat cats,” predatory lenders, or deadbeat borrowers.

The urge to make examples of any or all of these groups could lead to hastily crafted legislation and regulations that may actually extend the crisis.

We are already seeing how rules aimed at regulating financial institutions are making it harder for people with even good credit to get loans.

As politically opportune as it may be to seek only punishment for those who have abused the system, people are still losing their homes, their jobs, and their savings.

If our goal is to make lives better, then what is needed for true justice to take place is forgiveness and reconciliation.

Then we can begin to work toward a common good rather than pitting one group against another.

What will Jesus find when he comes again?

Will he find us working together to protect the weak and house the poor

or will he find a world set ablaze by vengeance and a merciless exacting of human justice?

Will we be found so covetous of what we have accumulated that we staunchly defend the status quo

or will we be found sharing our bread with the hungry?

Will we be holding our head up high with the righteous or hanging our head in shame with those who set their hopes only on earthly goods?