

♪ *I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus.*

God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.

The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus. ♪

The Scriptures for today ask, "Do you really want to walk as a child of the light?"

We are entering into the darkest & coldest time of the year, and many are struggling to support themselves and their families. How can I possibly do what that song says?

How can we walk in the light of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah says in the 1st reading?

The Gospel today is a warning about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ at the end of history. But even more it is an invitation to walk in the light of the Lord. It may sound like one of those "Left Behind" books or movies -but those books have no basis in Scripture or theology and are based on fear rather than faith.

The Gospel today is much more connected with what was happening to the people of Matthew's time, and with being ready to welcome Christ into our lives today. After all, "soon" has lasted for over 2,000 years in the literal sense of the world ending.

The words of today's Gospel describe what happened in 70 AD after the Fall of Jerusalem, and they sound a lot like what happened during the typhoon in the Philippines this year or Hurricane Irene which swept through Middleburgh in 2011. They could also describe the effects of global climate change, and the devastating effects of questionable mining practices in some parts of our country and abroad.

Paul warns us about the worship of the favorite false gods of his century, and of our own. The idols Richard Rohr calls the unholy trinity of power, possessions and pleasure. Now it is true that power, possessions and pleasure are gifts from God, but they become false gods when they are not used for the common good, or with awareness of the effect we have on the rest of the human family.

The misuse of power is what leads to rivalry and jealousy. In our day we meet that god as an addiction to control maintained by violence. We are told the lie that violence can cure violence by so much of our culture, perhaps because the weapons that are used to kill are so profitable to make and sell and to export to other countries. But this lie makes war seem necessary, and justifies capital punishment. It is an open door to choosing abortion and ignoring domestic abuse.

The misuse of possessions or, simply, the love of money, expresses itself in orgies and drunkenness. In our own times we see orgies of consuming which support economic structures that often cause poverty and starvation, and we see addiction to drugs, alcohol or simply comfort which enslaves both the addict and the people used to satisfy his or her compulsion. Our addiction to fossil fuels and the profits from it undermine our democracy by making elected leaders subject to corporate contributions. Our excess in using resources like water, oil and chemicals threatens to destroy the air, water and soil which sustain our lives.

Then there is pleasure, especially the pleasure of short term gain. When we misuse our capacity for pleasure we can get the brief high of promiscuity, lust & greed, but we end up using each other as objects.

But there is hope. Paul says, "it is the hour for you to awake from sleep." When we look around at our world, we can see the truth that "the night is far advanced." But Paul also writes - "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed ...the day is at hand."

That reminds me of a story about a flood. You have probably heard it - Joe is in a flood, and waves off a rowboat, a motor boat and a helicopter because he says, "God will take care of me". Then he drowns, and when he gets to God's throne, he asks, "Why didn't you help me?" and God says, "I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat and a helicopter. What more do you want?"

It is a good story, but have you ever [heard it from the point of view of the people who were in the rowboat, the motorboat, & the helicopter?](#) They used their possessions to help others who did not have resources.

The vision of [Isaiah & of Jesus is possible](#) if the owners of the boats & helicopters work together with those stranded by the floods, droughts, fires & storms in our day.

The prophesy of Isaiah is a lens Jesus uses to describe the **Reign of God** which He promises [Instead of worshiping Power, Possessions, & Pleasure, Jesus calls us -to repent,](#)

~to turn around ~ to use our technology for peace rather than domination

~to seek a *new* economy that uses money to promote the common good and care for all creatures rather than promoting the EXCESSIVE wealth of a *very few* and dividing people into haves & have-nots.

[The image of turning spears into pruning hooks & swords into plows is not just poetry.](#)

Sr. Anna and I actually saw a **plow** that was made out of a **sword**. A friend of ours who had lived in the Middle East most of his life showed us a simple **plow** that could be pulled by an animal or a person which had been made from a **sword**.

But the process could go either way. The metal in a **pruning hook** can be melted down & made into a **spear**, as well.

There is a choice, for the people of Jesus' time & for us in the 21st century.

Once we are awake, we can look at the world & the church [through](#) the lens of the Prophet Isaiah & of Jesus

*~ we can recognize the rowboats, motorboats & helicopters God is sending us thru other people ~ we can be people who use our own possessions & power [[our helicopters, motorboats & rowboats](#)] for the good of each other, [especially](#) anyone who is vulnerable **or** in need.*

One of the ways I have found to use the gifts I have been given to care for the ones Jesus calls the least of his brothers & sisters is the fair trade movement.

Late in 2001, after reading materials from Sr. Anna's IHM community, I discovered that there was a something called the fair trade movement that paid growers a fair price & promoted sustainable agriculture which protects the environment. Coffee was its first product - because it was the 2nd most widely traded commodity in the world (after oil), but later it certified some brands of chocolate & other products. Coffee is my addiction of choice, so I looked for Fair Trade *Coffee* in Schoharie county where I live. I couldn't find it anywhere - even in the local health food store which was a center of witness for peace and justice in the area. I knew that Green Mt. had some lines of its coffee that were fair trade certified, so, on December 17, 2001, I wrote a letter to Price Chopper asking them to carry it. I received an email back within a week saying they would do it. Price Chopper now carries its own brand of Fair Trade coffee. For more information on the movement, go to: www.fairtradeusa.org.

At a Franciscan gathering of people involved in working for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, Sr. Anna and I told this story. I said, "it's not much, just a little thing" when a young man who had just returned from being a lay missionary in Central America jumped up & told me that it was not a little thing. He said that it is a matter of life and death for the people he knew there because that they are guaranteed 33 cents on a dollar when they sign on to fair trade, rather than 8 or 9 cents from the major coffee corporations.

When I shop for coffee and chocolate (which is sold under the brand names: "Divine" or "Green and Black" and others) & I look for other things that are fair trade certified, like tea and cocoa, I am very aware that I am helping to feed and clothe Jesus himself present in our midst in the poor.

Advent is a season which asks: Will I walk as a child of the light or run away from the darkness? It's about choosing to love with determination, working to make this corner of the world a place of peace, and to reach out to bring justice, love and peace to the whole human family.

It is about using our rowboats, motorboats and helicopters to rescue each other and to care for the earth and all its creatures.

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Readings for the first Sunday of Advent – A Cycle

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10 (The wolf shall be the guest of the lamb...there shall be no harm or ruin on my holy mountain)

Responsorial Psalm 72: "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever."

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-9 (Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you)

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12 (Re-form your lives, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand)

For more information about Fair Trade products and to see the logos that identify products that are fair trade certified, see "Fair Trade reflections" on the "Reflections" page of the Bethany Ministries website: www.bethmin.org