

Fourteenth Sunday *per annum*
Year C, 2025

Is 66:10-14c Gal 6:14-18
Ps 66 Lk 10:1-12, 17-20

What makes for peace and prosperity

Peace to this household. Peace to you, gathered here. Peace to the people of God. Peace to the Church of God. Peace to this household. Will the peace I offer you in the name of Jesus the Lord remain with you, or will it return to me?

In our first reading from the prophet Isaiah, the Lord, speaking through his prophet, promises a restoration of Jerusalem, the city of David, that had been ruined by the Babylonians. Jerusalem, the capital city, the holy city for the people of Israel, is symbolic of the entire people who call themselves Israelites and of their nation. Now the people of Israel are beginning to return to their land from exile. They are poor and exhausted and downcast. Their cities were left in ruins, with only a poor and ragged remnant left behind. Their culture had been nearly annihilated, along with their language and religious practice. And so the Lord speaks through his prophet to encourage them, promising restoration: “I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.”

This new prosperity, though, will come in the form of foreign aid – this is the meaning of “the wealth of the nations” – and it will be foreign workers who will rebuild Jerusalem (60:10). This is both a triumph for Israel, that others will build for them what will become

their glory, their joy, and their boast. But it is also meant to humble them, for it is the Lord's intention that foreign peoples should contribute to Israel's new glory and should be joined to Israel forever in worship of the one true God (66:23). All nations, all peoples will be gathered as one. All will belong. As we heard in one verse of the responsorial psalm: "Let *all on earth* worship and sing praise to you, sing praise to your name." It is fidelity to God alone that makes possible both peace and prosperity for all.

Elsewhere in that same prophecy, Isaiah takes the people of Israel to task for their wicked deeds: their faithlessness and avarice (57), their hardheartedness toward the poor and oppressed (58), their lies and perjury, their lack of justice and righteousness (59). Despite these shortcomings, the Lord will show his righteousness. God will restore and send prosperity on his people so that they may learn to become like him: just, true, righteous, merciful, and kind. In a word, holy.

Alas, this is a lesson that mankind refuses to learn. It's not that we're incapable of learning it. It's that we don't want to. Instead of the biblical vision of universal peace and prosperity, in which we acknowledge and accept all people as brothers and sisters, under one holy, righteous, and benevolent God, we tribalize and ostracize. Us and them. We're the good ones, they're the bad ones. We become suspicious. We nurture a toxic paranoia that becomes hatred. We believe obvious lies, and we repeat them with relish, and we will not be convinced otherwise, even when wise and holy

people speak truth to us. No, we prefer our propagandists to our prophets (Jn 3:19). Damningly, we do not punish propagandists for their lies; we punish prophets for speaking the truth.

The Lord God, even in the pages of the Old Testament, made it more than plainly clear what he expected of his people in terms of righteousness, in terms of how they were to treat others, especially the poor and downtrodden, the orphan and the widow, the laborer and the sick ... and the foreigner. Maybe one day, and maybe one day soon, I will cite you chapter and verse on each of these things.

Not that anyone will believe it. Not that anyone will be convinced by the word of God, the holy scriptures, to see the world and others according to God's commandments and then to act in accord with the divine will. But I will do so so that on the day of judgment, there will be no excuse for ignorance, for indifference.

When preaching, we priests are supposed to be prophetic. We're supposed to tell the people of God the things they don't want to hear, even when that is an exercise in futility. Again, from the same prophecy of Isaiah: "Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast. Tell my people their wickedness and the house of Jacob their sins" (58:1). Sometimes the point of the prophetic word is to provoke a choice: acceptance or rejection, receiving or refusal.

There are those who receive the word of God and its blessings, which alone can make for peace in this world. And there are those

who refuse it, reject it, and for all kinds of reasons. The rejecters are more numerous. They always have been. Even among those who call themselves Christians, who love to boast about their standing and position in the world as Christian – and not as St Paul admonished in our second reading (Gal 4:14), that the world, through the cross of Christ Jesus, has been crucified to them. It is not enough, as Jesus himself taught in Matthew's gospel, to *say* "Lord, Lord," or even to "do mighty deeds" in his name. If we do not do the will of the Father in heaven, we are deemed evildoers and the kingdom of heaven will be closed to us (Mt 7:21-23).

Why do people, then, and why do Christians in particular, continue to reject the message of the scriptures, the message of the gospel? We find a sufficient answer in the scriptures themselves. First, a passage that I have cited often enough, John 3:19:

this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed.

Sin causes us to reject the gospel. We prefer the darkness of our own so-called wisdom to that of God. We think God's ways and plans impossible, implausible, unlikely to meet with success, because we reason in worldly terms and not in terms of the kingdom of God. Proud, arrogant, smug, we refuse to say we have sinned, we have done wrong, we have thought wrong. The sinner, who in his pride

refuses to repent, hates the light because he does not want what he does exposed as sin.

A second text that helps us to understand why the word of God is so consistently rejected is found in 2 Tim 4:3-4. And this passage, too, I have cited more than once in my homilies.

For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers [to suit their own likings] and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths.

Refusing the lessons of the Teacher, the Master, God himself, people will seek out their own experts, sages, gurus, anyone who will tell them what they want to hear, confirm their prejudices, play to their egos. And so they stop listening to the truth, and they begin to believe in the fictions (the lies) they tell themselves and peddle to others. Two thousand years ago Paul warned against listening to the all-too-convenient lies and misrepresentations of the propagandists. Today, the warning is as timely as it is unheeded. People love their propagandists. And by people, I mean we. And by we, I mean you. And by you, I speak first to myself.

A final scripture passage that explains rejection of the word of God as the foundational authority upon which we must order our lives, both individually and collectively, is Colossians 2:8, where Paul writes:

See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.

These “empty, seductive [philosophies] according to human wisdom” Paul elsewhere calls “[pretensions] raising [themselves] against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5). The scriptures, and Jesus himself, tell us what we are to believe and how we are to behave. But because this means that we will have to let go of our possessions, our position, our prestige, our power, we rebel, and we let ourselves be led astray by seductive, worldly thinking to which we try to accommodate the demands of the gospel. Which is the greater authority, the word of God or the word of men? Why, then, are we so captivated by the human pretensions – the political, economic, social, or moral ideologies – that dare to raise themselves in opposition to what God himself has taught and revealed to us? Because the light in us is darkness, and yet we call it light. How great, then, is the darkness in us! (see Mt 6:23).

In the days before his passion, as Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, that city, who, in Jesus’s words “[kills] the prophets and [stones] those sent to [her]” (Mt 23:37), “he saw the city and wept over it, saying ‘If this day you only knew what makes for peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes’” (Lk 19:41-42). The stubbornness, the resistance, the rebellious spirit of his people, personified in the holy city of Jerusalem, caused the Savior to weep, for he, as the prophets before him, had spoken to them the word of God and the

commandments of God, which alone make for peace. But to no avail. Alas! It is a lesson that remains unlearned to this day, even among the people of God.

These words are of no comfort to those who are perishing. For them, they are folly and foolishness. But to those who are being saved, the message of the cross is the power of God (see 1 Cor 1:18). And God wishes us to know the truth, which alone can set us free (Jn 8:32). God wishes us to enjoy both his peace and his prosperity, even in this life. God wills to redeem for himself “a people humble and lowly” and to take away the shame of our misdeeds and rebellion (Zeph 3:11-12) and to comfort us “as a mother comforts her [children],” carrying us in her arms and fondling us in her lap. So the Lord God wishes to comfort us, if only we will listen and learn, repent and turn to him with all our hearts, and do his will.

Peace to you, who are gathered here. Peace to the people of God. Peace to the Church of God.

“Peace to this household.”