

My friends in Christ, today's *first* Scripture passage comes from near the end of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Many Scripture scholars refer to the Prophet Isaiah as something like the "fifth Gospel" because of how much of what the Prophet says is fulfilled by Jesus Christ; today's text is a prophecy of the perfection of Creation that awaits the completion of all that Jesus began and which His Church must continue unto the end of days. The Prophet speaks here of rejoicing, of gladness; he calls for exultation because the God of all consolation wills to grant us comfort and rest. Mortal life is so utterly wrought with frustration and sorrow and toil as we know, and sure enough, there *is* some intermittent cause for rejoicing here and there every now and again...but the Prophet speaks *here* of what is eternal: no more anger, no more strife...but only rejoicing and gladness, exultation and comfort, forever and ever.

And situated right at the heart of this prophecy is a strange image: prosperity that the Lord will spread over Jerusalem like a river. In the prayer of the Church that is called the "Liturgy of the Hours," this very same Scripture passage is included in the Psalms and other canticles that we pray, and the antiphon that introduces *this* text is something of a rewording of this strange image, "I will make a river of peace flow through Jerusalem." But *why* is this a strange image? Why is it weird to envision a river flowing *through* Jerusalem? To understand this strange-ness, we need to know a bit about biblical geography: Jerusalem is a city that is built on a mountaintop; you see, all throughout Sacred Scripture, "Jerusalem" often is synonymous with "Zion." As in *Mount Zion*. Rivers do not flow *through* mountains. They flow *down* them and *around* them – but not *through* them. Imagine, if you can, the Spokane River flowing *through* Mica Peak; there is a reason why the Spokane Valley is the Spokane *Valley*: because a river runs through *it* and *not* through Mica Peak.

It seems, therefore, that the Lord (speaking through the Prophet) is proposing a geological impossibility here. But *that*, I think, is precisely the point! It *is* impossible for rivers to flow *through* mountains. It *also* is impossible for "the wolf [to] be a guest of the lamb," for "the leopard [to] lie down with the young goat," for "the calf and the young lion [to] browse together." Because what

surely will result in any of *that* is raw predator-prey bloodshed! And yet, the Prophet Isaiah tells of *that* impossibility, too. And, of course, it is quite impossible for a dead man to rise from the dead and live again...yet the Prophet foretells *that*, too.

Because as the Archangel Gabriel proclaimed for Mother Mary at the Annunciation, *nothing* is impossible for *God*. Predator and prey living side-by-side, in perfect harmony? Impossible – no, *not* impossible. Rivers flowing *through* mountains rather than of *down* them, or *around* them? Again, that is impossible – no, *not* impossible.... World-wide peace, amongst *all* peoples, forever and ever, amen? Of *all* things, *that* has got to be the *most* impossible – but again, no, *not* impossible, because nothing is impossible for God.

Okay, then how is the *impossible* rendered *possible*? To understand that *first* question about a river flowing through Jerusalem, we needed to know a bit about biblical *geography*. And *now*, we need to know something about biblical *spirituality*. Biblical scholars (in fact, all the way back to the writers of the New Testament) frequently have viewed the Old Testament Jerusalem (especially the Temple therein) as a foreshadow of the Church. And *now*, we must learn a bit about biblical etymology (the *language* of the Bible). What does *church* mean? The English word “church” is an ancient derivation of the German word *kirche*, which is the German approximate of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which in turn means “assembly.” Not some *building*, not some faceless *institution* – the Church is an *assembly*, first and foremost...an assembly of *people*. The Church is *us*. Saint Paul writes *extensively* about this very idea – that *we* are in very truth the Church of the Lord, that *we* are the Mystical Body of Christ, that *we* are His harvest field, that *we* are the temple that He builds.

And so, we the Church are the fulfillment of the Temple, the fulfillment of what Jerusalem was always *supposed* to be: a city on a hill that cannot remain hidden; a beacon shining bright in the darkness of night; the light of the world for all the world to see.... And so *now*, hopefully we begin to understand how the *impossible* is in fact *possible* for *God*: a river of peace flowing *through* the city of Jerusalem *really* is peace flowing *through* our hearts and our souls. And what *practically* does all of

that *look* like? Well, it looks like this: we *pray* for peace in our world, we *sing* about it, we may even *talk* about it...and *then* we actually *live* it. I recommend that we begin with our speech. We *know*, I presume, that there are many different sins of speech: detraction, gossip, slander. Perhaps we say nasty things about public figures and yet *justify* it with excuses like, “Well, he is Republican, so it is okay,” or “she is Democrat, so it is okay.” (And we have the gumption to wonder why we cannot seem to achieve peace in our world when *we ourselves* say such things or post such things on social media! Huh!)

Right here in front of our parish church, 4th Avenue is *only* twenty-five miles per hour...but how many drivers each day race through here like it is some sort of freeway! Well *I* cannot control *them*; I can only control *me*, and so *I* will drive the speed limit here (*hopefully!*). Likewise, the sins of speech might start *elsewhere*, but they will (*hopefully!*) end with me.

Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, to run the extra mile – and He commands us to these extraordinarily hard things because He wills that the sins and injustices of *others* will *not* become the sins and injustices of *us*...but rather that they would *stop* with us. And thus in these and other such little ways of virtue-pursuit...in these and other such little ways of discipleship formation...*hopefully* we will be doing *our* part to bring the peace of God and the light of Christ out there into the world; because as for me, I would be striving to *choose* to let that river of peace flow through the Jerusalem of my heart and soul.

And so, may it be that with the love of our Father Who art in Heaven, by the grace of Jesus Christ, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit within the temples of our souls, we would strive, each day and every moment, to be holy agents of a true and lasting peace out there in the world...so that the heavenly river of the peace of the Lord would flow through the temples of our hearts and souls and thus be shared with everyone around us, for the salvation of souls and for the glorious majesty of God.