

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14c

This passage of melodious Hebrew poetry is addressed to the Jews who have just returned to Jerusalem after a long and hard exile. They are in need of comfort and assurance, perhaps also of hope, as they view their dilapidated city. The times are hard. The survivors of the Babylonian Captivity are wondering about the future, for at present they are still vassals.⁴

Thus says the Lord:

10Rejoice with Jerusalem Here the author joyfully sings of Jerusalem, the capital city of the messianic kingdom in which God dwells among his people and fulfills every prayer. Here she is referred to as the mother of all the elect. As the messianic people dwell in the city and receive joy and peace, prosperity and love, they are likened to a child sucking precious milk from its mother's breast.¹ The true Jerusalem of God, the Jerusalem of which Christ is the Prince, transcends the stone walls of a city. She is the Church and she knows her days of mourning, but she remains a place of steadfast hope. She overcomes all trials and rises full of gladness.⁴ **and be glad because of her, all you who love her; exult, exult with her, all you who were mourning over her!**

11Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk Milk symbolizes comfort and Jerusalem will resemble God in that she will be able to give comfort. **of her comfort, that you may nurse with delight at her abundant breasts!**

12For thus says the Lord: Here GOD is speaking. **Lo, I will spread prosperity** Here the word "prosperity" is used to translate the Hebrew word "SALOM" (peace) and it refers to a paradise of joy where man lives reunited to his God. "SALOM" is therefore, the messianic greeting par excellence.¹ **over Jerusalem like a river,** God is the source of this river which passes through the world like a river of peace and its name is the Church. Mankind desperately needs this river so that they will not degenerate into a desert.⁴ **and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap;**

13as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort. This beautiful poetic image that portrays universal peace, contentment, and love changes and God Himself takes the place of Jerusalem —fondling, comforting, and nursing His children. This was used in the early Baptismal liturgy.³ This is one of the places in scripture where God's goodness and loving care for all his children is expressed by the image of motherhood.⁶ In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective "perfections" of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband.² (CCC 370)

14cWhen you see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bodies flourish like the grass; the Lord's power shall be known to his servants. This is a wonderful verse about how God, in His incredible mercy, has left the door open for those who believe and obey him. The faithful remnant asked God for two favors: show them compassion (Isaiah 63:15-19) and punish their enemies (Isaiah 66:6). This verse closes with the promise that the Lord's power will be used to favor His faithful remnant and that His wrath will be shown to His enemies as the last line of verse 14, which is not part of our reading for this Sunday, says: "...but to his enemies, his wrath."⁵

Galatians 6:14-18

This is the end of the letter to the Galatians which was written to counter Judaizers who were encouraging Gentile Christians to be circumcised according to the Jewish law. They apparently regarded circumcision as a sign

of prestige, but Paul insists that the only boast he needs is that of the cross of Jesus Christ. Through the cross, Paul's whole life has been reoriented, so that he has died to "the world, to all that is opposed to Christ."¹¹

Brothers and sisters:

14 *May I never boast except in the cross* "Cross" here means the whole Christ- event.³ *of our Lord Jesus Christ,* We are not saved by circumcision, the sign of the Old Covenant, but by the cross of Jesus Christ by which the New Covenant has been sealed and which has come to be the sign of the Christian.⁷ *through which the world* By this he means the moral universe of man poisoned by sin.⁴ It denotes all that stands at enmity with God—the sphere of pleasures and ambitions. This "world" has rejected Christ and so those who follow Christ reject the "world."³ *has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* St. John Chrysostom tells us that "The Cross is the sign of victory displayed to fend off demons, the sword to use against sin, the sword with which Christ ran the serpent through; the Cross is the will of the Father, the glory of his Only Son, the joy of the Holy Spirit, the ornament of the angels, the assurance of the Church; it is what Paul glories in, it protects the saints and lights up the whole universe."⁷

15 *For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation.* Circumcision is now meaningless. What matters is whether we are reborn in Christ. Those who are a new creation through Baptism are the true children of Abraham.¹¹

16 *Peace* (Total well-being)⁹ *and mercy* (God's kindness)⁹ *be to all who follow this rule and to the Israel of God.* Paul extends the blessing beyond those immediately addressed.³

17 *From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.* Paul may have been the first person to have received the stigmata, that is, the wounds of Christ but he probably is referring to the scars of the various sufferings that he endured for the sake of preaching the gospel.¹² In 2 Cor. 11:23-27 he tells how "Five Times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes less one; three times I was beaten with rods; I was stoned once, shipwrecked three times; I passed a day and a night on the sea. I traveled continually, endangered by floods, robbers, my own people, the Gentiles; imperiled in the city, in the desert, at sea, by false brothers; enduring labor, hardship, many sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst and frequent fastings, in cold and nakedness. Leaving other sufferings unmentioned there is that daily tension pressing on me, my anxiety for all the churches." In Paul's time people often branded their slaves to show that they possessed them. Paul is saying that he bears the "brand" or "mark" that shows that he belongs to Jesus.⁷ For ourselves, if we experience no suffering whatever as a result of living our faith, we probably need to ask how well we're living it.¹⁰

18 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.*

This reading is the conclusion of the letter to the Galatians. There is a strong note of finality that comes before the blessing. In modern idiom Paul would be saying something like: "Please, no more about this circumcision matter! The issue is dead and the suffering I have endured on behalf of Jesus gives me the authority to say so." Then follows the customary blessing, which closes the letter and restores a sense of unity and peace after the heated debate.¹⁰

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Luke is the first of the evangelists to develop a Church-consciousness. In this selection the elements of preaching, healing and spreading the Lord's peace are to be interpreted not merely as the directives for first-century ministers, but as definitive formation elements of the Church in any age.¹

1 *At that time* The mission probably began in early October of the year before Christ died and ended no later than mid-December of the same year.¹⁷ *the Lord appointed seventy-two* The mission of the Twelve symbolized the preaching of the gospel to Israel.¹¹ According to rabbinic teaching there

were seventy-two nations in the world so the significance of sending out that many disciples is that the message of Jesus' arrival and the inauguration of his kingdom is to reach to the ends of the earth.¹⁰ **others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs** There had to be at least two to give formal testimony¹⁵ and this became the common missionary practice in the early church.¹³ No record of the names of the seventy-two has come down to us.¹⁷ **to every town and place he intended to visit.** Jesus was in Samaria and was headed toward Jerusalem. (9:51)

2He said to them, Note that Jesus made this request of those who were going into the mission field. **"The harvest is abundant** This is the harvest of the entire human race that is in need of harvesters. Those who follow Jesus are called to help by their presence and their prayers.¹⁰ **but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.** This gives us a picture of God's people ready to be gathered into the kingdom.¹³ The harvest is a figure of the growth of the kingdom, but apostles are necessary to reap the abundant harvest which is there. The harvest is not sown by the apostles, but by Jesus Himself, the apostles reap what he has sown. In the end of days all men are gathered for judgment as the harvest is gathered.¹⁹

3Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. They will be defenseless, completely dependent on Jesus for whatever is needed.¹⁴ We are also reminded here of the prophecy of Isaiah that in messianic times "the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb."¹¹

4Carry no moneybag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. This emphasizes the urgency of the gospel task.³ Customary greetings could be quite elaborate which caused much waste of time.¹³ There is also the consideration that they are in Samaria which was shown in 9:53 to be hostile.¹⁶ Jesus applies these words to the Twelve at the Last Supper (22:35-36) and they were later applied in the early Church to larger missionary bands.³

5Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' This notion of peace rests on the biblical concept of the Word of God as being not only a message but somehow an embodiment of God's own personality and power. The peace message of the Christian missionary is more than an expression of good will—it is the *offer of a gift* (of salvation¹¹) from God of which they are privileged to be the ministers and heralds.¹⁴

6If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Feeling peace in our soul and in our surroundings is an unmistakable sign that God is with us and it is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. St. Josemaria Escriva reminds us that "What takes away your peace of soul cannot come from God."¹⁴ **Those who bring spiritual gifts can expect their physical needs to be taken care of by the beneficiaries.** The Catechism tells us that the minister should ask nothing for the administration of the sacraments beyond the offerings defined by the competent authority, always being careful that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments because of their poverty. The competent authority determines these "offerings" in accordance with the principle that the Christian people ought to contribute to the support of the Church's ministers. The laborer deserves his food.² (CCC 2122)

7Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. According to Catholic tradition and Canon Law, Christians are obligated to contribute to the Church from their earnings. These offerings help to support the clergy, provide for the necessities of liturgical worship, and equip the Church to minister to the needy. **Do not move about from one house to another.**

8Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, Dietary laws have no force any more.³

9cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.' In verse 5 they were told to spread the Lord's peace and here they are told to heal and to preach. These three things comprised their main functions.¹⁸

10 Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say,
11 ‘The dust of your town that clings to our feet, ever that we shake off against you.’ This is a sign of rejection for those who reject the Apostles. It is a symbolic act of judgment.¹³ Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand.

12 I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom The wickedness of Sodom is proverbial as the extreme of depravity. This was the area chosen by Lot when he separated from Abraham and it was as fair as the garden of Yahweh. When two messengers of Yahweh were received as guests by Lot, the men of Sodom attempted to assault them and from this episode the unnatural vice of sodomy was named. Lot and his family were warned to leave the city and it was then destroyed by a rain of fire and sulfur from the heavens. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah became a proverbial example of the anger and judgment of Yahweh.¹⁹ on that day This refers to the day of judgment.¹⁶ than for that town.”

17 The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.”

18 Jesus said, “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. The fall of Satan (the chief of the demons) is a symbolic way of telling the disciples of the effect of their mission. The rapid advance of God’s kingdom through the disciples’ preaching and ministry of exorcism is matched by the downfall and retreat of the devil.¹³

19 Behold, I have given you the power to ‘tread upon serpents’ and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. The gift has permanent value, for the tense of the verb stresses that Jesus has already conquered Satan in principle; the effects of his victory will be realized in the Church.³

20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” Disciples should rejoice more because of their sonship in God’s family than because of their successful missions.¹³ While the missionaries find that great power accompanies them, and even the spirit world is subject to the word they preach, the cause of their joy is their heavenly inheritance, not their earthly successes. In other words, it is God who reaps the harvest and it is God who is the reward of the harvesters.¹⁰ The prize is not human glory through feats of power but heavenly glory through following Jesus to Jerusalem, to Calvary. In the eyes of God, doing His holy will at all times is more important than working miracles. In another place Jesus says: “None of those who cry out, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. When that day comes, many will plead with me, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons by its power? Did we not do many miracles in your name as well?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers.”¹⁴ To have your names written in heaven is to have them inscribed in God’s heavenly “book of life”,¹³ which came to mean eternal salvation. No one who is not written in the book of life will enter the heavenly Jerusalem and they will be cast into the pool of fire.¹⁹

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) “The Book of Isaiah” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (2) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings” by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., (5) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (6) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (7) “The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,” (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Galatians” by John J. Pilch, (10) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (11) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (12) “The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians” by William Barclay, (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of LUKE” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) “The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE,” (15) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: LUKE” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (16) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (17) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (18) “A Celebrants Guide to the New Sacramentary” by Kevin W. Irwin, and (19) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.