

Leftovers from Christmas

The memory of Christmas Day is beginning to fade from view. The presents have all been delivered and opened, the wrappings have been cleaned up and thrown out or put away till next year; the Christmas meals have all been cooked, shared and enjoyed by family and loved ones. The leftovers may have been shared with family and have been reheated for meals. The Christmas dishes have all been cleaned and put away, maybe even stored away for the year. Decorations are beginning to even look faded and maybe all of the lights are not turned on everyday anymore. Thoughts are beginning to turn to New Year's Eve and the new year ahead. It seems like we are fast approaching the slow days of winter where not much is happening and we go into a kind of 'coasting' mode, settling back into our routines of the daily grind. What we are left with are the leftovers of Christmas - the last cookies to be eaten, the last presents to put away, the decorations to be taken down and stored, the Christmas cards recorded of those received and memories tucked away in our minds.

But despite having these leftovers, we see that we still need to do certain things - do all those daily chores, fulfill our responsibilities to our family and jobs. It might seem like these leftovers of Christmas will be set apart from the rest of our lives, leftovers filed away with memories of other Christmases, some good, some not-so-good. As with all memories, they do inform us and guide us on our current paths. Those longed-for relationships that had been renewed at Christmas time and we resolve to keep in touch, exchanging emails and phone numbers as well as recalling some of those 'duties' we must do - keep in touch with distant family members, call more frequently are all things that these Christmas leftovers guide us to do.

Sometimes, these leftovers lead us to do those things that need to be done, but in a slightly different way. For example, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to make the appropriate sacrifices to God at the Temple as prescribed by Jewish law. Luke goes to great length to emphasize the Jewish background of Jesus. He mentions that Jesus is presented at the Temple in accordance with the law and that Mary went through the required purification rite according to the law after giving birth to Jesus. While Mary and Joseph did what was prescribed, the actions of Simeon and Anna were not. Simeon and Anna were, in a way, leftovers. They were older and their official functions at the Temple had been reduced. In effect, they were retired and waiting for the promises of God given to them to be fulfilled.

These parts of the story show us how God uses society's 'leftovers' to do something new. Just as we may repurpose our leftover Christmas meal into a different meal (instead of just reheating it), God can take what society has pushed to the edges and use it to accomplish God's goals. God used Mary and Joseph, two poor people in a small, out-state town to have God's Son brought into the world as a human. God gave promises to Simeon and Anna about what they will experience in their lifetimes before they were called to their eternal home. Knowing that God is true to God's promises, not only on a grand scale like promising to save the world, but also on an individual level such as Simeon and Anna, gives us the assurance that any promises that God makes, God will keep. It may take some time, but it will come about in God's timeframe, at the right time.

So, it comes to how has and how can God use each one of us to accomplish God's goal of saving the world? While the 'hard' part of saving the world was accomplished by Jesus through the empty cross and tomb, we are tasked with

the 'easy' part - to proclaim *God's* love for the world through deed and word. We are to show the world that this saving act by *Jesus* makes a difference for us in the here and now. We do not need to live our lives in a selfish manner, getting what we can and trying to gain our salvation on our own. We can live with the certainty that *God* will provide enough of what we need to live. We can take the risk of helping someone else who is seen to be on the edges of society - whether it is by economic class; or a physical or mental handicap; or someone who is abused and taken advantage of by someone else; or someone who is lost to an addiction of any kind - we can take the risk and help in some way. It may be something small such as simply acknowledging their presence or listening to their situation, basically letting them know that they matter.

As with all of the *Gospel* accounts, there is much more hidden in these words than first suggests. If one is acquainted with the Book of *Leviticus* and the prescribed sacrifices for the different purification rites, one would notice that instead of the required lamb sacrifice, *Mary* offered two birds instead, thus indicating the poor status of *Mary* and *Joseph*. *Luke* emphasized in this *Gospel* text that there is a reliance on the law as outlined in the *Old Testament* Scriptures. This emphasizes that while *God* is doing something new through *Jesus*, it is still based on what has come before. More importantly, and what we need to remember is that the promises *God* made in the past are still valid and those to whom those promises were made will experience them being fulfilled.

The fulfillment of *God's* promises are summarized by *Paul* in his letter to the *Galatians*, which is the second reading for today - chapter 4 verses 4-7. *Paul* doesn't know exactly why *God* chose the time for *Jesus* to come, but nevertheless, it happened and because of this, our status as children of *God* is

renewed and restored and we gain the inheritance which we lost so long ago. This becomes our identifying mark - that we are a child of God through our baptism in Jesus' name.

So, as we start to turn to the new year, may we look to our past, see what God had promised us and may we be delighted that with God there are no such things as 'leftovers,' only opportunities and may we be guided as Simeon was to look to God for the fulfillment of all of God's promises to proclaim God's goodness for everyone.

YouTube Links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/DPcG033Gz9A>

Sermon: https://youtu.be/_Sgm2mOGXW4