

My mom doesn't like to watch TV much- she calls it all nonsense, and maybe it is, but she has her favorite shows- the Catholic channel from Brooklyn and *All in the Family* and *Dennis the Menace* and she really loves nature programs on PBS and on the National Geographic Channel. She is fascinated by them and why not? You see the incredible beauty and complexity and diversity of God's creation, and like she says so many times, "*you can really see God in that.*" And you can.

But of course, in the shows that feature the animal kingdom, it's not always so pretty. You get these scenes of animals hunting each other and running from each other and pouncing upon each other and tearing each other to shreds and eating each other, and she turns her eyes from the screen when those scenes come on, like she does when the commercials from the ASPCA come on and she can't bear to see the abused and neglected animals that look straight at you from the screen and break your heart.

And we hear the reading from Isaiah:

*Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.*

*The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.*

And that breaks your heart, not because it is happening, but rather because it is very far from happening, even seeming to be impossible. And that's why Isaiah chose to use that

imagery. The animals who by nature are predators- the wolf, the leopard, the lion, the bear- in this idyllic scene will be at peace with the prey- the lamb, the kid, the child, the calf, the cow- and those who are now enemies will be friends and all will be good and all will be as it should be.

For Isaiah, however, this is not impossible- it is very possible and it will happen under the new king in the line of David- who is of course Jesus- who will bring about God's purposes for the world and restore the peace and harmony that we had at the beginning of the world, and which we lost through our arrogance and our refusal to share what in reality belongs to everyone.

Again, this is not impossible, but granted, it is very difficult to achieve. Our society has been so inured to violence, so accustomed to people inflicting needless pain and suffering upon each other that it can seem like a utopian ideal that will never be realized, because humans are so mean to one another and how can they ever change?

Jesus showed us a different way. His society was just as violent and as unjust as ours, maybe with more primitive ways of inflicting that suffering and that mistreatment, but just as bad as today. Jesus dared to go against what His culture and even what the religious authorities said to do and how to believe and to think, and instead He lived a life of inclusion of all people, even those that were seen to be less than human, if you can believe that; a life of respect for all people, even those He disagreed with; a life of caring and compassion for all people, not just those in His tribe, as was expected and even commanded, but for all persons without exceptions.

Isaiah is putting forward a return to Eden- a Paradise restored- and for us as Christians, we believe- we know- that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh and dwelling among us- we have a way back to that reality. And it goes without saying that it's going to take some work.

You can't just say you believe in Jesus- that's just the beginning. You have to, as St. Paul says, "*put on the mind of Christ*", which simply means to grow closer and closer to Christ in faith, in hope and in love - to become increasingly identified with Christ. This means good works- you can't do without them- but it also means a change of perception- of seeing the world and everyone in it with the eyes of God, not seeing the other as someone who is naturally against me and wants what I have and who ain't getting any of what I have.

It also means thinking for oneself and not so easily believing something simply because your tribe or your family or your political party is telling you to believe, especially when it goes against your conscience and you know it's not right.

It is then that every thought, every understanding, every action, every relationship of ours, is informed by Christ and we begin to be transformed into Christ's presence in the world. Our own transformation then carries over into the transformation of our communities and the effects of all that ripple throughout the world in ways we can never know and we can then achieve things that we could never imagine.

Slowly but surely then, we will get along with one another and take care of one another and all will be good- all will finally be as it should be. Again, from Isaiah:

*On that day, the root of Jesse,
set up as a signal for the nations,
the Gentiles shall seek out,
for his dwelling shall be glorious.*