

HOMILY FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 9, 2007

Introduction

Yesterday at about this time I sat in the airport of Cochabamba, Bolivia, wondering if my delayed flight to Santa Cruz would arrive in time for me to connect with American Airlines flight #922 to Miami and on to Washington, DC. At that moment it looked as if I wouldn't make it and would have to find an internet cafe along the way to suggest you get a substitute for this Mass.

Well, obviously, all turned out well - I made my connections and here I am.

I

I left behind me in Bolivia a world of immense poverty. You've all seen it: Indian mothers sitting on city sidewalks begging from passersby with their children playing around them;

adolescents sniffing glue to get something of a high in the midst of their pretty hopeless lives; people on crutches and in wheelchairs - handicapped women and men and young people trying to cope in a Third World country.

II

But I also left a world of immense Hope - not hope in small letters: some superficial longing for things to get better, a wishy-washy desire like the song "be happy, don't worry". Rather a deep-seated conviction that the dream of God for humanity shall still come about; an Advent Hope writ large; the Hope described in Advent Scripture readings like today's:

"On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse...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. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain..."

And from Paul's wish for the early Christian community in Rome: "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another..."

III

Let me offer two concrete examples of this Hope from these recent days in Bolivia:

First, our Franciscan lay missionaries. Several of them are working in centers for neglected and what are sometimes called there "disposable" children - offering them food, clothing, education, shelter and above all hugs and encouragement to make something of their lives. And these generous missionaries in turn receive Hope from the children, as they see them gradually blossom

Second example: one of our American Franciscan friars, Jim McIntosh from this area of Northern Virginia, told me why he so loves Bolivia. He greatly appreciates a special trait which he notices in the Bolivian person: working for the common good and the real Hope which that trait reveals.

IV

So what does any of this have to do with us here this morning in Washington, DC, so far from the world I left just 24 hours ago?

Well, on the flight home (besides getting these few thoughts sorted out) I was reading some theology [it's always good to read theology when you're so close to its source] and I came across these Advent words which I find exceptionally applicable to us who live here in the heart of the empire:

"Jesus' whole mission was directed to communities disintegrating under the impact of imperial order. Jesus' solution was a return to the Mosaic covenant with its strong emphasis on economic justice. Jesus' conviction was that the Power that moved the stars was returning to remake society - that the reign of Caesar was going to yield to the Reign of God. This was the hope he offered. But there is nothing more subversive - or threatening to the empire - than Hope. Hope allows the people to imagine life without the unnecessary suffering imposed on them and reminds them that the suffering in their community is not a natural part of life to be selflessly tolerated."

May we be signs of that Hope as we assent once again to the promise of a Savior, once fulfilled, and to be fulfilled in the final chapter of human history.