

DECEMBER 7 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

When we hear Isaiah, chapter 11, at once we think about Advent. And when we hear “Advent,” at once we want to hear that beautiful prophecy from Isaiah 11. He speaks about “an ideal king,” and “the ideal king” here is King David. And he’ll have the qualities of intellect, common sense, and devotion. And this is expressed in gifts of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, courage, fear of God, and good counsel. If these seem familiar to you, these are the gifts that you and I receive at the time of our Confirmation, and it’s the gifts that you and I use constantly without even noticing it.

Now, what happens when we have the Advent of this ideal king? You have an Advent of a return to Eden. There is perfect harmony and grace. There are no predators and prey. The lion, the bear, and the wolf will live in harmony with the kid, the lamb, the cow, and the calf. It is ecology in its purest sense. Men and women will live in harmony with animals, with fish, with birds, and the very earth on which we live. This is harmony in its perfect sense.

But is that our reality of the world today? Quite the contrary. We’re not only speaking about predators between animals, and prey and predator, but we’re speaking about human beings who cannot live together. We have enough news right over our television and our newspapers, and we’re not speaking basically of Russia, and Ukraine, and Gaza, and Palestine. It seems to be all over the world, in Sudan, in Myanmar, in Yemen, in the many countries of South America. We are all living and we want that harmony, and that will come when we allow the Prince of Peace to come into our hearts.

This is the same balance that Paul would speak of in the letter to the Romans when he says, “May the God allow you to live in harmony.” And he’s not speaking only to the Romans, but he’s speaking to all the churches that he has established throughout Mesopotamia, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Corinth, in Athens, all these places. And he says, “There is not supposed to be a distinction between Jew and Gentile, between slave and free, between the rich and the poor, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised.” We are all called because we are one in Christ, and we are one in Christ because Christ has decided to offer Himself up to the Lord. And He has offered Himself by being obedient, obedient even until death, death on the cross, but the Lord would not let Him down. The Lord would raise Him up again, and it’s in the harmony of the resurrection that we all come together.

Which brings us to the gospel. And in the gospel, we hear that weird creature— weird person, rather— John the Baptist, dressed in camel’s hair, with a belt around his waist, eating locusts and wild honey. Would you like to have a diet like that? And yet, he is a mixture and a balance between the right and the left, as you and I consider to put people in categories. On the one hand, he’s very strong against the scribes and the Pharisees. “You brood of vipers, who do you think that you have this sense of entitlement?” He’s very much like the German Lutheran pastor who was hung by the Nazis just a few weeks before the end of the Nazi empire. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “You know, we speak about ‘cheap grace,’ grace that is bought in the marketplace.” And what does this mean? It is baptism without church discipline. It is confession without personal absolution. It is communion without confession. We seem to think that it is very easy, but we need to be firm in the law in order of our times, and many of us relate to that. I also relate to that.

But there's the other side too. The law was meant for human beings and John the Baptist has shown this in the way he treats people. The ordinary person who came to him and says, "What must we do?" He says, "If you've got two tunics, give to one who has got none." He did not dismiss the tax collectors and says, "No more tax collecting for you." He says, "No, do your duty, but do not overcharge. You know, take the extra 10 percent for yourself." Even the Roman soldiers who were not of the people of Israel, he said to them, "By all means, guard the people that you are supposed to. You are entitled to certain privileges. Do not over-extend that." In a way, John the Baptist brought together what you and I put in categories, the right wing and the left wing, the liberal and the conservative. There is none of these distinctions when we are one with Jesus Christ, and we say "Maranatha," "Come, Lord Jesus."