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Prayer for Openness to Divine Gifts

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Prayer for Openness to Divine Gifts

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First Sunday of Advent

Sunday Readings for November 27, 2011 for Cycle B:

Is 63:16-64:7; Ps 80; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mk 13:33-37

PRAYER FOR OPENNESS TO DIVINE GIFTS

Lawrence E. Frizzell

"The stranger loses his way in the forest because he forgets to look back to see where he has come from." This observation of a native North American may be applied to the spiritual order as well as to the uncharted forests of the Northwest. Each celebration of the Eucharistic Mystery should allow us to recall with deep appreciation the unique past event of Jesus' death-and-resurrection so that we will be able to keep our bearings in the present and move with confidence, as a community and as individuals, toward the goal of human history. The season of Advent reinforces the message given in the Feast of Christ the King. The entire human race and therefore each of us are called to intimacy with God, based on a divine judgment of our worthiness, which is rooted in the divine call and gifts. The parable proclaimed in the Gospel emphasizes vigilance. God may seem to be like an absentee landlord who has left his servants with specific tasks for the benefit of the community. Do we have the maturity to act responsibly even without supervision?

St. Paul assured the Christians of Corinth that God has bestowed numerous spiritual gifts upon them. There may be a tinge of criticism concerning the Corinthian overemphasis on certain gifts (see chapter 12-14); to achieve their true purpose all special graces must be placed at the service of charity. God's fidelity, rather than any human qualities will be the basis for the strength to persevere until the day when Jesus will come as judge. Thus we pray for the assistance we need to remain faithful to God's call, "now and at the hour of our death."

These truths had been taught by the prophet Isaiah more than seven hundred years before the time of Jesus and Paul. Isaiah influenced his disciples so profoundly that they echoed his message and applied it to new circumstances for several centuries. The first reading records a prayer that applies to the human condition in every age. We can make it our own.

As in most prayers, the prophet addressed God by titles that were appropriate to the given situation. "Our Father" and "Our Redeemer" expressed the community's sense of dependence on and assurance of divine assistance in all needs. Boldly, the prayer asks: "Why did you let us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?" (63:17). The prophet is not denying human free will and our responsibility for decisions, yet he somewhat poignantly asks: "Why do you let us misuse your gifts?" Not very mature, perhaps, but all too human! "Deliver us, O Lord, from our own folly!"

If only God would show power and might, intervening to surprise us with marvels even greater than during the Exodus and at Mount Sinai! "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you...No ear has ever heard, no eye has ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him" (63:19; 64:2-3). St. Paul used this

passage as he reflected on the crucifixion of Jesus and God's revelation through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:8-10). The awesome deed involved seeming relinquishment of power so that the death of Jesus would bring unheard-of-surprises to those who believe and trust that their deepest needs will be answered.

"Would that you might meet us doing right, that we would be mindful of you in our ways!" (64:4). Here the poet acknowledges that the gift of free will demands a response based on imitation of God's righteousness. God's presence in the world is demanding, so we feel the weight of our weakness and wonder how God can look upon us benignly. Then we recall the love that brought us into being and the care showered upon us since our life began. "O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hands" (64:7). The molding of each of us into the divine image is a continuing process. The clay has not yet been fired in the crucible of death, so God can reshape us again and again as we struggle to comply to his will. Such is our prayer as we begin the new liturgical year.