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December 1, 2013

Foundation for Peace

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Foundation for Peace

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This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

First Sunday of Advent

Sunday Readings for December 1, 2013 for Cycle A:

Is 2:1-5; Ps 122; Rom 13:11-14; Mt 24:37-44

FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The peoples of the ancient civilization, unaware of the vastness of the world, often considered that they were at the very center of everything. Thus did the Chinese emperors speak of the "Middle Kingdom" and the Romans called the great sea "Mediterranean". Various peoples worshiped their gods near or on the highest mountains in their areas; Israel was convinced that "the LORD has chosen Zion; he prefers her for his dwelling" (Ps 132:13). Both Isaiah (2:1-5) and Micah (4:1-4) looked to the future when Mount Zion would indeed be the highest of mountains. Then the nations would acknowledge that the God of Israel is the Lord of the universe and they would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the center of the earth. Although worship and communion with God are the essential reasons for prayer and pilgrimage, the prophets realized that liturgy is also a favored context for learning. Knowing God, the nations would be instructed concerning the way people should live, since all life is a pilgrim journey toward intimacy with the Creator. "For from Zion shall go forth instruction (Torah), and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Is 2:3). The Ark of the Covenant, containing the two tables of the Law, was the throne of God in the Holy of Holies, so the Temple was the place par excellence where the divine Word was proclaimed. In the future God's rule would be accepted by the peoples of the world. God would arbitrate the disputes of nations so effectively and fairly that no one would resort to violence. Then the intelligence, resources and industry of people would focus on the wholesome tasks of providing food, shelter and clothing for all. If weapons were abolished as obsolete, then military academies could become training centers for the art of mediation. "They shall not train for war again" is a hope echoed in the teachings and prayers of recent Popes, in the great assembly hall of the United Nations and in cities like Coventry and Hiroshima.

However, the principles of Isaiah and Micah have yet to become basis for international order. Didn't another prophet contradict them by reversing the image? 'Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak man say, 'I am a warrior!'" (Joel 3:10). Here we have a classic example showing the necessity of reading a text in its context. With supreme irony God calls the nations to mobilize even the weak to form an army. But when they march toward Jerusalem they will find themselves in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (the LORD judges). "For there I will sit in judgment upon all the neighboring nations" (Joel 3:12). Would that nations and individuals learn the futility of violence before divine judgment comes upon them! As the Master warned his followers, "all who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Mat 26:52). After stating that the time of judgment is the secret of the heavenly Father (Mat 24:36), Jesus described the situation of common human activities being so absorbing that the signs of impending judgment were ignored. As it was before the Deluge, when only Noah and his family were vigilant, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Enthusiastic efforts to calculate and predict "the day and the hour" (or the month and year) of final judgment will fail. Rather, Christians should reflect on the

need for a constant and sustained effort to live up to the challenge of the Gospel. Imitating Jesus, who taught and lived a message of justice and mercy, righteousness (integrity) and peace must be the pattern of our existence. Indeed we pray in hope for the kingdom of God to come, when all creatures will acknowledge the supreme authority of the divine will in their lives. But this petition of the Lord's Prayer is completed by that which follows. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10). Jesus picked a theme of the Jewish tradition regarding the correspondence between earthly and heavenly worship (see Ex 25:9, 40) to emphasize that in prayer and in the moral order our lives must reflect the mystery of God. The nations may be oblivious to life's deepest meaning, but we should respond to the prophet's call: "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" (Is 2:5).