Spiritual Light in Time of Crisis

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Modern technology gives us the illusion that we have overcome darkness. No longer is the working day limited to the hours of daylight, nor do we need to fear so many of the uncertainties of darkness as in former times. Therefore, it may be more difficult for our generation to grasp the symbolism of the contrast between light and darkness. Yet the Church insists that we recognize the limitations of merely scientific efforts to dispel darkness, whether by electricity or by complex "information systems". For human beings to know who they are and where they should be going, more is needed than physical and intellectual illumination. At least as important are principles of the moral order!

Isaiah, an intelligent youth of aristocratic background living in Jerusalem, received his call to be a prophet in 741 BC. Because the Temple was the favored place for divine revelation and the application of God's law to daily life, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were more fortunate than those who lived on the frontiers of the Land of Israel. Yet the birth of an heir to the Davidic throne will bring light and joy even to these benighted people. Pusillanimous King Ahaz of Judah is told of the coming child to be named Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us"), whose progress through early childhood would be a reassuring sign of God's protective presence during a time of military danger to Judah (Is 7:1-16).

Judah survived because the king took Isaiah's advice to have faith in God rather than to enter an alliance that would place the kingdom in the crossfire between the "superpowers" Egypt and Assyria. His patience won the day! As Isaiah's message became part of the written heritage of his long prophetic career, "Immanuel" came to be linked to the hope for a more enduring experience of the divine gifts that bring peace. This faith-filled expectation is expressed in familiar terms that focus on a person.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder - Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

(Is 9:5, immediately after the passage proclaimed on this coming Sunday)

How many petty rulers in our days have learned the lesson that Isaiah taught Ahaz? In the age of missiles and warfare by remote control patience is more necessary than ever before! How many great leaders turn to a personal teacher for guidance? Rather, they think that they need panels of experts and an army of agents trained in various arcane disciplines. In the world of politics and military might, whether now or two millennia ago, few people of intelligence and influence would
have paid attention to a Galilean carpenter! But Jesus came, not merely to supply answers to human problems, but to draw persons into deeper union with his heavenly Father. As Immanuel (Mt 1:23, citing Is 7:14) he called very ordinary people from the simple tasks of their trade. "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). Peter, Andrew and others became learners (disciples), not in a specific program with special techniques but in an intimacy wherein Jesus shared his person as well as his wisdom. Following him, they would slowly become acolytes, bearing his light to the world. They would draw people into a network of relationships centered on Jesus. Indeed, they would build a community grounded on divine mercy and forgiveness, learning to find harmony in prayer that would renew again and again the experience of Immanuel. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). As fishers and light-bearers, they would make disciples of all nations. No fear would overwhelm those who encountered Immanuel, because he promised: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).