

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Necessary Component of Faith First Week of Advent Friday, December 4, 2015
8:15 AM **Is 29:17-24; Mt 9:27-31** (**St. John Damascene**, priest, doctor) (We are called on to live in Christ and to live the light and to be the light for others, as John Damascene did. We are chosen to keep alive the prophecy of Isaiah.)

“Do you believe that I can do this?”

Today’s first reading is from the **prophet Isaiah**. As you may know, Isaiah is a very long book, at least 66 chapters. The first part of it is before the great Babylonian exile; the middle part of it during the exile, the last part of it after the exile.

This pre-exilic part is prophesying a wonderful age coming: when peace will reign, when the blind will see, when the longings of the human heart will be satisfied. Now the interesting thing is this took place prior to the worst period in the history of Israel. So what are we to learn from this? First of all, **prophecies are not fulfilled right away. We have to be patient.**

Today we are celebrating the memorial of **St. John Damascene**. St. John Damascene is really one of the Fathers of the Church, in fact, the last one from the East, the last of the great Eastern Fathers. What is very unique about John Damascene is he was born in a Muslim city, Damascus, after the time of Mohammad. He grew up as a Christian in a very Muslim culture and distinguished himself, so much so that he became a major accountant in the caliphate. And against this culture, which was non-Christian, he developed actually a quite unique brand of Christian thought. So he is an unusual man. **He kept something alive in a time of darkness: the Spirit of Christ, the light of Christ.**

Our day as well is a time of darkness, not only physically because it’s December, but it’s really dark because of people, because of violence, and evil mindedness often presenting itself as somehow divinely inspired. **We have to keep in mind both St. John Damascene**

and Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied a new age of peace, but it's not necessarily going to be tomorrow. St. John Damascene learned how to live in the caliphate, even serving the caliphate, but really keeping alive the Spirit of Christ, developing the very ideas of the gospel.

We are living also in an age that is dark and which is not Christian. People keep throwing around the idea the United States is a Christian country. Well, it used to be; it has lost that sense of dedication to Christ for many reasons. But **we are called on to live in Christ and to live the light and to be the light for others, as John Damascene did. We are chosen to keep alive the prophecy of Isaiah,** which was partially fulfilled during the life of Jesus, partially.

You see an example in today's gospel, where blind men came to Jesus: we want to see, and Jesus restored their sight. Well, that is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. But notice that Jesus said, "Do you believe I can do this?" **I don't think Isaiah actually foresaw the component of faith necessary for the prophecy to come through,** to become real, to be realized and fulfilled. He doesn't say that. In fact, many of the prophets give no indication that they realize that **people have to do something to make the grace of God operative, cooperating with it.** In the New Testament it's very clear. We have to have faith. We have to believe in Jesus. We have to believe in the power of God, that our belief is itself a necessary component for this prophecy to be fulfilled. In many cases Jesus could work no mighty signs because there was no faith. The same today: **God continues to address us, but is there any faith? Is there any response?** This is the question that the Scriptures raise in our minds.