

December 19<sup>th</sup>  
"O Radix Jesse"

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a  
Luke 1:5-25

Ever since Fr. Dan McMullin spoke about the "O Antiphons" at an Advent Evening of Reflection several years ago, praying them has become my favorite devotion, for these antiphons are the traditional names of the Messiah.

Today he is called the Root of Jesse. If you were at mass on Monday, you will remember that the gospel was the genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew. And you will remember that there are many generations between Jesse and Jesus. Yet we say that Jesus is the Root of Jesse. Something about this title suggests that the Messiah is the foundation upon which the nation of Israel is built.

The prophet Isaiah says that "the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples;" and "the nations shall inquire of him." The Messiah will be king in Israel, but he also will be a beacon of light for all humankind.

And what do we ask of the Root of Jesse? We ask for salvation, and we beg him to come and not to delay.

From what are we asking to be saved? As Christians, we might say, "from the forces of evil," those which are violently evident and those which are subtle and deceptive. As Americans, we might say, save us from the insecurity, the uncertainty brought by the terrorist attacks and a weakened economy. Some people might say, save us and our children from hunger, save us from disease, from the cold, from homelessness, from ignorance, from boredom, from addiction, from those who wish us harm and would kill us. And many will plead, save us from death, from a descent into nothingness. And please do not delay, for we face annihilation.

The prophet Habakkuk declares that "the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late." The Messiah is coming; he is with us already; the evidence of his presence may be as startling as the angel's appearance was to Zechariah, but the outcome will be more wonderful than the miraculous birth of Elizabeth's son. So, like the parents of John the Baptizer, we are called to live justly and faithfully, as we wait for the fulfillment of our salvation.

This is radical hope. The word "radical" means root. In spite of everything around us that may seem hopeless, we who are disciples of Jesus continue to look with hope toward that "signal to the peoples," toward that "Root of Jesse," toward the Messiah who has already come, who is with us still, and who will come again on the last day.