

## Harvest Thanksgiving 2016

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”. (Isaiah 55. 10-11)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Prophet Isaiah delivered the Word of the Lord in this morning’s Lesson to the people of Judah, and the citizens of Jerusalem. They had been besieged for years by the powerful army of Assyria, and this was a much needed Word of hope.

*“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*

With the Assyrian army all around Jerusalem, choking off all supply routes, we can only begin to imagine the desperation. The people of Aleppo, Syria, must certainly know -- in a way that we cannot – the desperation of Isaiah and the people he was writing to. Food and drink had become so scarce that even the price of basics, like wine and milk, was astronomical. Living in constant fear of invasion, and scratching for everything they could get their hands on to eat, life was beyond difficult for the people of Judah. We can only imagine their thin and haggard bodies; their growling stomachs; their low energy level; and how full of despair their lives had become.

But then Isaiah began to speak this Word of hope: *“Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.”* The Lord had not forgotten His people. He knew the extent of their misery, and He was going to rescue them. In fact, His deliverance of Judah would be so complete and far-reaching that even *“the mountains and hills would break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field would clap their hands”*. The Lord was going to restore peace and give His people joy again. And it happened, too. According to the description in 2 Kings, chapter 19, one night, with the Assyrian army all around Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers. The Scripture says, “When people

arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria departed and went home". (2 King 19.36)

Let's pause here for a minute and think about this. What we are talking about, really happened. In fact, if you go to Jerusalem, you can see the 533 metre tunnel that goes underground from the holy city to the spring of Gihon. As the Assyrian army advanced, Hezekiah, the King of Judah, had it dug in order to supply his people with fresh water. So, this Word in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is easily proven for those who may have trouble believing.

But in addition to its historical witness, this Word also has an application for us. First of all, it speaks to us about God's salvation. There are times when we feel surrounded and overwhelmed and absolutely alone – parched, empty and helpless against the forces of evil. And what does the Lord say? *"Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you"*. It is an invitation for us – *"Come unto Me,"* the Lord says *"hear and your soul shall live"*.

But what are we to hear? God's Word. It is life-giving, like the rain. Listen to this: *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it"*.

The Lord says here that His Word will not return to Him empty. In other words, like a seed, it is full of potential. It contains life; and He will cause it to accomplish His purpose. One commentator gave this explanation: "Without rain the earth would quickly become a desert bereft of animal and vegetable life; but God supplies this need. And no less wonderful is the way in which He provides for the wants of the soul. In man's spiritual life God's Word is as powerful and indispensable as the rain in the natural world."

In saying that – that God's Word is as powerful and indispensable to the soul as the rain is to the earth – what does the commentator mean? He means that by God's Word written in Holy Scripture, and in His Word Incarnate (enfleshed) in the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, we have salvation from all the powers of sin and hell. Think of that, and reflect upon it! For example, it is in His written Word

that we hear, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”. (St. John 3.16) It is through His written Word that we have the invitation to come and the promise of His Divine refreshment: “Come unto Me all that labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you”. It also through His holy Word that spiritual graces are sown in our hearts so that the fruit of the Spirit may grow and develop in us.