

## **Scripture Gives Us Hope (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Year A)**

### **Romans 15:4-9—The Old Testament was Written for Us**

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name..." (Romans 15:4-9)*

1. Context: conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome (15:7-9)
2. Old Testament: "written in former days," but for our "instruction" (15:4)
3. Endurance: "endurance" "perseverance," "fortitude" (Greek *hypomonē*) (15:4);
  - a. Definition = capacity to hold out in the midst of difficulty
  - b. Paul frequently mentions endurance (cf. 2 Cor 6:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:4; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 2:2)
  - c. Jesus says endurance is necessary for salvation:

[Y]ou will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance (Greek *hypomonē*; Latin *patientia*) you will gain your souls. (Luke 21:17-19)

3. Encouragement: "comfort" or "consolation" (Greek *paraklēsis*) (15:4)
  - a. Definition = to lift someone's spirits; give encouragement
  - b. Paul frequently mentions this virtue (2 Cor 1:4-7; 7:4, 13; Phil 2:1)
4. Hope: "hope" (Greek *elpis*) (15:4; cf. 1 Macc 12:9)
  - a. To look forward to something not yet possessed with confidence/trust in God
  - b. Paul frequently mentions (Ro 5:4f; 12:12; 15:13; 1 Cor 13:13)
5. Promises to the Patriarchs: all "nations" (Greek *ethnē*) will be "blessed" (Gen 22:18)

### **The Living Tradition**

John Chrysostom: These things were written so that we might not fall away, for we have many battles to fight, both inward and outward. But being comforted by the Scriptures we can exhibit patience, so that by living in patience we might dwell in hope. For these things produce one another—hope brings forth patience, and patience, hope." (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 27*; trans. *NPNF1*, 11:536)

Catechism: Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 1817)

### **O Little Town of Bethlehem (Philips Brooks, 1868)**

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
*The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.*

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Year A)**

1. Paul says that the Old Testament was written “for our instruction” (Rom 15:4). What role does the reading of the Old Testament play in your life?

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### **For Further Reading**

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1998).
3. Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).