

Trust in the Hand of God

- I. “Remember at this time not the misdeeds of our fathers, but your own hand and name: for you are the Lord our God.” (Baruch 3,5f)
 - A. Our Lord God is creator and sustainer of all of his creation. He created it to be good and he wants it to remain good and to be restored to the good when it has been broken and abused. God’s loving hand is in all things, even that which is wounded. He did not inflict the wound but he can use our woundedness to achieve the good according to his holy will. He binds up in love and heals so that we may come to trust in him. Imagine if we lived fully in the trust of God. Imagine if we truly placed all our trust in him. There would be no worry or anxiety or fear. How much does worry anxiety and fear take away from our lives and steal from our joy.
 - B. How often in holy scripture does our Lord say, “Do not be afraid.” “Have no anxieties.” “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” God wants us to place all of our trust in him. This doesn’t mean that we will be immune from all suffering but it means that God is always with us to bring good out of our trials and tribulations. God is the Emmanuel - God with us.
 - C. We often want to trust in God and surrender to his gracious will and purpose. We even tell the Lord - “Jesus, I trust in you.” However, though we want to trust we hedge our bets, we hedge our trust in God. We may say to ourselves: “I trust you God, but I would sure like to know the plan...and I always have a plan B, which I will often treat like it was really plan A. I sorta trust more in my own plans.”
 - D. Through the Incarnation, the Word-Made-Flesh, trust in God takes on a deeper meaning. It is not simply following a law but it is fulfilling the Law and living fully trusting always in the Father, in his plan for salvation and in his love. Jesus teaches us how to trust in God, the Father, and to live in obedience to his will. Jesus is the living witness, the perfect prophetic sign of promise and fulfillment. In Jesus, the Word of God, his promises, take on flesh and are visibly and historically fulfilled. Jesus is the faithful witness to the faithfulness of God. Jesus draws all people into the trust of God. So our theme for this retreat is: Trust: Born Anew in Jesus the Incarnation.
- II. Advent is a time when we examine the theme of promise and fulfillment. God has promised us that all things are in his hands and that he has a plan that is unfolding to accomplish the salvation of all people. God chooses to work within history, within human persons to accomplish his plan of salvation. Our life is a part of God’s plan for each of us has been created with purpose and meaning in our lives. Each of us are given gifts that we are called to use to advance God’s work in creation. God does not destroy his creation but rather he perfects his creation through the Law and then through grace. God is saying to us as human persons, trust me, I have a plan. God is trustworthy. He has shown us his hand that directs all things to the good. We trust, not in our own plans, understanding or wisdom but we trust in God and in his divine plan and order. We trust in his promises. All of God’s promises work toward fulfillment. God is faithful to his promises, to his covenant, and we can place our trust in him. Advent teaches us a deep trust in God who in the fullness of time will reveal his plan of salvation to us and will make all things new in the power of his love. We may not understand the ways of the Lord now but if we trust in him we will see the way that he will accomplish his plans in our life.
- III. The covenant that God makes with his people. God binds himself to his people. God promises to never forget his people but to always be near to them and to provide for their

needs. God promises to always be the Lord in the lives of his people. God is a refuge, a fortress, a hiding-place for his people. At the end of the day we can always rest in God. On the Sabbath the people would enter into God's rest and confess their trust in God's goodness and his faithfulness.

- A. The covenant with Abraham: Gen 17,7 - "I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land in which you are now staying, the whole land of Canaan, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God."
- B. The covenant with Moses: Ex 6,7 - "I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God. You will know that I, the Lord, am your God when I free you from the labor of the Egyptians and bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."
- C. The covenant and David: Ez 34,23ff - "I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David; he shall pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them, I, the Lord, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them, and rid the country of ravenous beasts, that they may dwell securely in the desert and sleep in the forests. I will place them about my hill, sending rain in due season, rains that shall be a blessing to them. The trees of the field shall bear their fruits, and the land its crops, and they shall dwell securely on their own soil. Thus they shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bonds of their yoke and free them from the power of those who enslaved them. They shall no longer be despoiled by the nations or devoured by beasts of the earth, but shall dwell secure, with no one to frighten them. I will prepare for them peaceful fields for planting; they shall no longer be carried off by famine in the land, or bear the reproaches of the nations. Thus they shall know that I, the Lord, am their God, and they are my people, the house of Israel, says the Lord God. You, my sheep, you are the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God."
- D. The covenant of regeneration/restoration: Ez 36,22ff - "Therefore say to the house of Israel: thus says the Lord God: Not for your sakes do I act, house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name, which you profaned among the nations to which you came. I will prove the holiness of my great name, profaned among the nations, in whose midst you have profaned it. Thus the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when in their sight I prove my holiness through you. For I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God."
- E. The word of Jeremiah in Exile about a new covenant: Jer 7,23 - "This rather is what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper." Jer 24,7 - "I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart." Jer 31,31ff - "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for

they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

- F. In the early church: 2Cor 6,16 - “For we are the temple of the living God; as God said: “I will live with them and move among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Therefore, come forth from them and be separate,” says the Lord, “and touch nothing unclean; then I will receive you and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty””
- G. The new heaven and new earth, the Church as bride: Rev 21,1ff - “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.””

IV. The Psalmist encouraging our trust in the Lord.

- A. “The Lord is a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you; you never forsake those who seek you, Lord.” (Ps 9,10f)
- B. “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, my God, in you I trust; do not let me be disgraced; do not let my enemies gloat over me. No one is disgraced who waits for you, but only those who are treacherous without cause. Make known to me your ways, Lord; teach me your paths.” (Ps 25,1-4)
- C. “I am forgotten, out of mind like the dead; I am like a worn out tool. I hear the whispers of the crowd; terrors are all around me. They conspire together against me; they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My destiny is in your hands;” (Ps 31,13-16)
- D. “Trust in the Lord and do good that you may dwell in the land and live secure. Find your delight in the Lord who will give you your heart’s desire.” (Ps 37,3f)
- E. “O Most High, when I am afraid, in you I place my trust. I praise the word of God; I trust in God, I do not fear.” (Ps 56,3f)
- F. “Those trusting in the Lord are like Mount Zion, unshakable, forever enduring.” (Ps 125,1)
- G. “In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust. Show me the path I should walk, for I entrust my life to you. Rescue me, Lord, from my foes, for I seek refuge in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your kind spirit guide me on ground that is level. For your name’s sake, Lord, give me life; in your righteousness lead my soul out of distress. In your mercy put an end to my foes; all those who are oppressing my soul, for I am your servant.” (Ps 143,8-12)

- V. Jeremiah and Isaiah the Prophets - “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord; the Lord will be their trust. They are like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit. More tortuous than anything is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord explore the mind and test the heart, giving to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their deeds.” (Jer 17,7-10)
“Open up the gates that a righteous nation may enter, one that keeps faith. With firm

purpose you maintain peace; in peace, because of our trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock.” (Is 26,2-4)

VI. God has a plan for peace and well-being. In his plan he is with us always and we are with him. We trust his plan for our lives and he prospers us and brings us peace. God dwells with us and in us. He surrounds us with his love and protection. He never gives up on us but continuously seeks us out.

VII. Julian of Norwich: Showings: “Our Lord showed me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, for he is that love which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw truly that he is everything which is good, as I understand. And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what is that to me? It is that God is the Creator and the lover and the protector. For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have love or rest or true happiness; until, that is, I am so attached to him that there can be no created thing between my God and me. And who will do this deed? Truly, he himself, by his mercy and his grace, for he has made me for this and has blessedly restored me.”

A. “It is God’s will that we receive three things from him as gifts as we seek. The first is that we seek willingly and diligently without sloth, as that may be with his grace, joyfully and happily, without unreasonable depression and useless sorrow. The second is that we wait for him steadfastly, out of love for him, without grumbling and contending against him, to the end of our lives, for that will last only for a time. The third is that we have great trust in him, out of complete and true faith, for it is his will that we know that he will appear, suddenly and blessedly, to all his lovers. For he works in secret, and he will be perceived, and his appearing will be very sudden. And he wants to be trusted, for he is very accessible, familiar and courteous, blessed may he be.” (ch. 10)

VIII. The Incarnation reveals to us the close presence of God who is with us and worthy of our trust.

A. Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us. Joseph’s dream and the message of the angel: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” (Mt 1,20ff)

B. Jesus reveals the Father to us as working among us to bring us healing and new life. “Behold, the hour is coming and has arrived when each of you will be scattered to his own home and you will leave me alone. But I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.” (Jn 16,32f)

- C. Jesus teaches us to live in trust and to place all our trust in the Father because he loves us and always hears us when we call out to him.
1. "And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me."" (Jn 11,41f)
 2. "We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the power of the evil one. We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment to know the one who is true. And we are in the one who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." (1Jn 5,19f)
 3. "Let your life be free from the love of money but be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never forsake you or abandon you." Thus we may say with confidence: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (Heb 13,5f)
 4. "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8,28)

IX. God wants our trust. God wants us to rest in him and in his presence. "Those who leave everything in God's hand will eventually see God's hand in everything."

X. If God is for us then nothing can be against us: "What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (Rom 8,31ff) Trust in the power of his love and presence, for nothing will be able to separate us from his love.