

### **December 8, 2013 Stump of Jesse Homily**

Dear brothers and sisters, in the summer of 1960, the Olympic Games were celebrated in the Eternal City, Rome. Many of the world's greatest athletes gathered there for several weeks of spirited competition. There was one prominent figure on the world stage who recognized the enormity of the event, the then reigning pontiff, Pope John XXIII.

Hoping to preserve the memory of the summer games, the pope, through the services of the Vatican, issued a commemorative coin. Featured on the face of the coin was the image of a tree stump, from which a fresh new sprig was sprouting. The pope was mindful that the young athletes competing in these Olympics were the children of parents who endured the horrors of the war years. One thinks of the hunger and exhaustion, the concentration camps, Hiroshima, the battle of the Bulge and Iwo Jima. For the Successor of Peter, the athletes were a sign of hope. They represented a new start, a fresh beginning.

Undoubtedly, the words of the prophet Isaiah inspired the Spiritual leader of the Catholic Church:

'A shoot shall come out of from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots" (Is. 11:1).

God will have something new from what has been cut down!

When I was a first year student studying for the priesthood at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, New York, I had an opportunity to visit the bishop Fulton J. Sheen archives, which were then housed at the seminary. Bishop Sheen's vast collection of books were on display in one of the rooms. On one of the bookshelves, there was a book with the arresting title, "Christ in Isaiah". I immediately took the book off the shelf.

In perusing the book, I learned that the mystery of the anticipated Messiah is hidden in the words of the prophet, only later to be revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The messiah will be the bearer of God's Spirit, a divine power enabling him to fulfill a mission for the benefit of the human family.

"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord" (Is.11:2).

"The messiah will be a righteous judge who administers justice in favor of the weak and the lowly". (Is.11:3,4).

"He will destroy the wicked". (Is.11:4).

Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, is the "shoot" through which Israel, withered and cut down, are brought into bloom.

As Christians, we must be a people of hope. If our spirits are "broken", if we have experienced failure in our past, and if we are in desperate need of "a new beginning", let us rejoice in the words of the prophet.

The promise of a messiah is an assurance that when something in us fails, or is cut off, something new can arise from a stump, or what remains of a tree once it is cut down.

God is faithful, God provides. In Jesus Christ, hope is reborn and we Christians are the grateful beneficiaries!

Amen