

November 27, 2016 The Visionary Homily: Brothers and sisters, directly across the street from the United Nations in New York City is a wall made of granite. It is known as the "Isaiah Wall" because of a biblical inscription etched in the granite, a quotation from the Book of the prophet. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" The words of the prophet sum up the very mission of the United Nations, which is to promote peace and discourage war.

In 1965, Pope Paul VI quoted these words in his famous address to the General Assembly. He appealed to the nations of the world to end all wars and seek peaceful solutions in times of crisis. Years later the American president, Ronald Reagan, also cited the words of the prophet in a speech he delivered at the United Nations. Since the early days of the United Nations, the mid 1940's, there have been many bloody wars. Thousands of lives have been lost. Yet the wall still stands. Do the words of the prophet have any meaning for the family of mankind today? Would the peoples of the world care if the wall came tumbling down? If the wall were to be demolished, the world would likely lose sight of Isaiah's message of hope, his dreams of the future and his call to be faithful. The incentive to build a world of peace would be undermined, if not ended for good.

As a man of faith, the prophet Isaiah holds out hope, even in the darkest days. In today's reading (Is. 2:2-6) he has a vision of Jerusalem in the distant future. He sees the holy city as a place of pilgrimage, not only for Jews but for all the peoples of the world. "All nations shall stream toward it" (Is.2:2), he writes. To put his prophecy in proper perspective, it might be helpful to recall the many athletes representing over one hundred countries entering a stadium or arena on the opening day of the Olympics. It is truly an impressive sight! And then there is St. Patrick's Cathedral in downtown Manhattan as Christmas nears. Christians from all parts of the world gather as one family to celebrate their fellowship in Christ!

Isaiah also looks forward to a time of universal peace. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they train for war again." (Is. 2:4) In his classic work, "*The Prophets*", the Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel comments on Isaiah's prophecy. He writes, "What to us seems inconceivable, to Isaiah was a certainty: War will be abolished. They shall not learn war any more because they shall seek knowledge of the word of God. Passion for war will be subdued by a greater passion; the passion to discover God's ways".

The question arises, is Isaiah a fool, a delusional optimist or is he a visionary, one who inspired by a vision to which we are not privy?

Perhaps some of you may be familiar with the name of Branch Rickey, a legendary baseball executive from a bygone era. In the late 1940's, Mr. Rickey, then General Manager for the Brooklyn Dodgers, had a vision of the future of America's pastime, the game of baseball, a vision not shared or welcomed by others. He was prescient in recognizing that the game would be more inclusive in the future. Acting on his vision, he became the first General Manager to sign an African-American to play for his team, Jackie Robinson. His bold decision met with disapproval by many in the baseball world, including not a few team owners. Some thought he was reckless while others considered him a fool. Too many were slow to embrace his decision and act in a similar fashion. But it is clear that he was a true visionary. Look what has become of

the game since the forties. Players from around the world play on Major League teams in America.

Some of our dreams and visions of the future may not come to pass in our lifetimes, if at all. We may appear as fools because of our deep religious faith. Nevertheless, we can still be proud bearers of a message of hope. "In days to come" (Is.2:1), the prophet writes!

We must always keep in mind that the future of humanity is in the Hands of God, who is the Lord of History. Truly, the future may bring us many surprises. But at the end of our days, there is the majestic figure of Christ, the one who is to come. For, as St. Paul writes to the Christian Community in Rome, "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed". (Rom.13:11)

All things are passing in this life; only Christ remains unchanged forever. Let us then follow the counsel of the prophet, who exhorts his readers "to walk in the light of the Lord". (Is.2:5)

Amen!