



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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15<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Year B  
July 12, 2009

Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. The psalmist is describing the perfect world where God will reign. Four attributes will mingle there: kindness, truth, justice, and peace. I would like to look only at the first two. The lectionary translates them as kindness and truth. These are the two attributes most frequently assigned to God in the Old Testament, often paired as in this psalm. They are rich terms that are translated many different ways.

First, kindness. This is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is God's most fundamental attribute, the only one that is actually identical with him. It is traditionally translated as love, but it is a specific kind of love. It is love that binds itself by covenant to the one loved. "Covenant love" seems to be the best translation. So "love and truth" is the more familiar formulation of this pair of attributes. God's *hesed* is a love that will not let go, that is totally reliable because God has bound himself by it. It is this love that is behind the whole plan of salvation, behind God's choosing a people for himself, his raising up a savior in our midst to free us from sin and make us a holy people. By covenant love he binds a people to himself. In the prophets this love took on an affective, even passionate dimension. God loves Israel as a jealous husband, even when she is unfaithful. The fullness of divine love was shown when God sent his son into the world to die for our sins. By this he established a new covenant, a relationship of love between God and men that can never be broken. So you can see how *hesed* can be translated as kindness and sometimes as mercy, as in the saying "His mercy endures forever." It's all *hesed*.

What about the second attribute, "truth"? It translates the Hebrew words *emet* or *amoonah*, both coming from the verb *aman* meaning "lean on." God's *emet* is his faithfulness to his promises, his reliability. You can lean on him and he won't collapse. Not so much abstract "truth" as he was for the Greeks (although he is that) but for the Hebrews "truthfulness" in the sense of being true to his word. So the most accurate translation for these two attributes would be "covenant love and faithfulness," even if that is unwieldy. The important thing is that these attributes fill that perfect world where God reigns, and it is a world which already exists. It is the world where God reigns in Jesus Christ. A world to which we belong by our Baptism. We are securely bound to God by a love that cannot be shaken and we can rely always on his help. We can build our lives securely on that love. Insofar as Catholics live by the new life of Christ strengthened by the Eucharist, they live in a world where love and faithfulness meet, and justice and peace kiss.



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This is the new life the apostles preached. It is the kingdom of God where sin and Satan are defeated and men and women are healed of their sicknesses. It is a world where men and women live holy and without blemish before the Father, adopted into his Son Jesus Christ, praising the glory of his grace. It is a world of people redeemed from sin by the blood of Jesus, where all things in heaven and earth are being gathered into Christ. We are “sealed with the holy Spirit, the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s possession.”

All of this is God’s work and ours to cooperate with. Our Holy Father has given us a new encyclical called “Charity in Truth.” This can be seen as an echo of the two attributes “kindness and truth,” though the Pope is using “truth” more in its present sense of intellectual knowledge rather than faithfulness. But he says both must coexist in our world. Love without truth is sentimentality; truth without love is harsh and dry. For us Catholics the important thing is to open our hearts to the inexhaustible love of God poured out for us, to rely on that love, and to let it purify our minds so that we can understand the truth and spread it to the people of our day.