

2 S. in Advent 12/6/20
Isaiah 40:1-11 B

COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE, SAYS YOUR GOD.

The Lord God led His people Israel through the Red Sea waters to the wilderness of Sinai. There, Moses went up on the mountain to meet God. And the Lord said to Moses,

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles; wings and brought you to myself. No therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6).

God spoke to the Israelites, “You are My people. I am your God.” The people of Israel had a very unique special relationship with God. Of all the people of all the earth, God chose Israel to be His own people. God promised them, I will dwell with you, by clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night. I will dwell among you in the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem. I will give you a ruler – the house of David, which will never depart from you. His throne will be established forever.

The Israelites felt special; they knew they were dad’s favorite. And they felt quite secure in their relationship with God, so they just decided they could do whatever it was they wanted to do, even if it meant going against God’s commands.

When His people started doing that, God sent prophets to tell them to stop sinning and call them to repentance. When the people of Israel heard that they said, “OK. Whatever”. So, God sent more prophets and these prophets announced that God was going to allow pagan armies to march in and carry them off into exile. And when the people of Israel heard this,

they said, “These prophets are heretics. Don’t they know we are God’s own people?”

So, they didn’t listen and they didn’t repent. And so, it happened in 587 BC, God sent the Babylonians into Jerusalem and they carried the Israelites away, into exile. The Babylonians laid waste to the land and even destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

And in exile, under the cruel hand of the Babylonians, the people said, “We have sinned”. So, in the midst of their warfare and the iniquity of their sin, they cried out to God, “We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name” (Is 63:19).

You know what that’s like. In your Baptism, God calls you to be His own child. God says to you, “You are My child. I am your God”. You feel special in that relationship with the Lord your God. That’s good. But sometimes, you feel a little too secure in that relationship with God. After all, it’s easier to get forgiveness than permission, so you just go and do what it is you want to do.

You do idolatry, making and creating gods for yourself. You trust in lady luck. You doubt and ignore the promises of God’s Word. You do not cherish and obey those in authority over you. You let the sun go down of your anger and refuse to be reconciled. You lust. You lie. You steal. You put the worst construction of the actions and words of your neighbor. You covet, because you want what your neighbor has.

You just go ahead and do what it is you want to do. And it does not take long, before all that doing what it is you wanted to do comes back and haunts you with grief and shame. Guilt so heavy a burden that your very bones ache. That is because your sinful flesh is at odds with God. So, the

message of Advent comes to you as it did the Israelites: REPENT, turn from your sin to fear, love and trust in God! When you are brought to the point of being distraught, despondent, to despair itself, you cry out to God like Israel did, “We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name” (Is 63:19).

The Good News of the Christian faith is that God hears. And He answers your cry,

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
 and cry to her
 that her warfare is ended,
 that her iniquity is pardoned,
 that she has received from the LORD's hand
 double for all her sins (vv. 1-2).

In the midst of your warfare with the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh, your rebellion against Him, God speaks to you words of comfort.

He calls you “Jerusalem”. My American Friends, my 21st-century American Friends, we must understand that in the Old Testament sense. Jerusalem was where the temple itself stood on Mt. Zion. And it was in the temple – behind the curtain, above the ark, between the wings of the cherubim – that God dwelt among His people. When God calls you “Jerusalem,” he is saying that He dwells among you, with you, in all the strife of earthly life. He is with you always, dwelling in your life, in your heart.

He tells you that “her warfare is ended”. Your warfare is ended because your peace with God lies in a manger in Bethlehem. It is our Lord Christ Himself who wins peace with God for you, because all of God’s wrath and anger against your sin is poured out on His own Son.

The Lord your God tells you that “her iniquity is pardoned”. It is this Babe of Bethlehem who puts an end to your iniquity, your sin. He takes all that iniquity upon His own body and is beaten for it. He is wounded. He is hung upon a cross where He bleeds and dies, for you, for your iniquity. It is His death upon that cross that pardons all your iniquities. It is as the Word of God assures us, “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).

You, Dear Child of God, have “received from the Lord’s hand double for all [your] sins”. The Good News of Great Joy is that you do not get what your sins deserve. You get Jesus! Jesus who was crucified, died, and buried so that you would be forgiven – forgiven double for your sins. That means in Christ, you receive double the comfort, double the peace and joy.

You need that! You need that because as you wait for the day for Him to come again to take you to be with Him, you find yourself in constant battle with the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. And you find yourself giving in to sin and iniquity. And that sin weighs heavy upon you. That great accuser, Satan, will come and make you remember that sin. The world will condemn you. And your own conscience, your own conscience, will never stop accusing you of doing what it is you did.

God says, “Comfort, comfort My people”. He says to you, Remember and cherish your baptism into Christ, for “Baptism now saves you” (1 Pe 3:21). He says to you, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. He says to you, “Take, eat; Take, drink. This is My Body, this is My Blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”.

But, that’s not the only comfort the Lord your God gives you.

When, in the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death, you feel lonely and abandoned, He says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (He 13:5).

When you are frightened and scared, He says, “I will command My angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways” (Ps 91:11).

When you are in despair, you can say with the Psalmist, “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God” (Ps 42:5).

When you are stressed, and life is just spinning out of control, He says, “I work all things together for your good” (cf. Ro 8:28).

In the hour of death, He Who is the Resurrection and the Life, says, “There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (He 4:9).

When God has something to say, He says it. And He has this to say to you, “Comfort, comfort My people”, because in Christ, your warfare is ended; in Christ, your iniquity is pardoned; in Christ, you have received double for all your sins.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.