

Second Sunday of Advent

Reading 1

[Is 40:1-5, 9-11](#)

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!
Here comes with power
the Lord GOD,
who rules by his strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
and leading the ewes with care.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14](#)

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;
the LORD—for he proclaims peace to his people.
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,
glory dwelling in our land.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;
justice and peace shall kiss.

Truth shall spring out of the earth,
and justice shall look down from heaven.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;
our land shall yield its increase.

Justice shall walk before him,
and prepare the way of his steps.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Reading II

[2 Pt 3:8-14](#)

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years
and a thousand years like one day.
The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay,”
but he is patient with you,
not wishing that any should perish
but that all should come to repentance.
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,
and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar
and the elements will be dissolved by fire,
and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.

Since everything is to be dissolved in this way,
what sort of persons ought you to be,
conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion,
waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,
because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames
and the elements melted by fire.
But according to his promise
we await new heavens and a new earth
in which righteousness dwells.
Therefore, beloved, since you await these things,
be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

Gospel

[Mk 1:1-8](#)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:
*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.*

*A voice of one crying out in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”*

John the Baptist appeared in the desert
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
People of the whole Judean countryside
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River

as they acknowledged their sins.
John was clothed in camel's hair,
with a leather belt around his waist.
He fed on locusts and wild honey.
And this is what he proclaimed:
"One mightier than I is coming after me.
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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HOMILY

We are living in troubled times. Few people would disagree with that simple statement. As a nation, a world community, and even as a local parish we face challenges that have no obvious solutions. I am sure that there are families and individuals who are facing situations which they wish were different. Perhaps that's the major sentiment – we wish things were different. We wish that the world was at peace; that we could move the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and terrorist attacks in Mumbai. We desire our financial markets to stabilize and recoup some of the record losses of the past several months. We would like to know that humankind could live sustainably on a fragile, wounded planet.

Our desire that things be different has been expressed so clearly in the last several months. As a nation we elected a president who promises change, even though it is not always clear what change we are requesting. The leaders of corporate America have descended upon Washington promising that the banking system will be transformed and the auto industry will be restructured. At the beginning of this new liturgical year, as we approach the end of the calendar year we find ourselves reflecting upon our lives and asking ourselves, what needs to change? We make resolutions for the New Year promising ourselves that this year will be different.

Perhaps in our desire for change we fail to ponder what precipitates such a need. Why does the world's largest economy stand on the precipice of collapse? Why does the incoming administration find it necessary to impose more stringent ethics regulations upon members of his transition team and incoming cabinet? Why do we find ourselves confronted by guilt, wounded by shame, and too often living in darkness? Our failure to ponder these questions, however, rises from more than our desire for change. Our failure also rests upon our denial of sin. Too infrequently do we address the reality of sin in our world and even within our own lives. Free market capitalism is tainted by greed too often. It is not uncommon for politicians lose sight of the common good when their views are distorted by arrogance, pride, and lust for power. The structures of our society invisibly embed injustice and oppression that is so readily accepted without challenge. As individuals, in those rare moments of insight and honesty, admit that sin is such a part of our lives and we quake at the thought that we know deep within our hearts and minds might be evident to others.

The reality of sin is so terrifying and appears so insurmountable that we continue in our denial, we turn a blind eye to the reality, and remain silent except to cry out for unspecified change; never truly expecting that the change we yearn for will ever be realized. The Gospel of Mark, the first Gospel written to communicate the essential elements of the life, death and resurrection begins long after the birth of Jesus with a rather odd figure. The Gospel begins with prophet in the desert who dared to speak the truth. John the Baptist, chosen by God as the last of the great prophets to point to the coming of Jesus, fearlessly invited people to admit the darkness of sin within their lives and relationships. The admission of sin was not for condemnation, was not for shaming, was to so that people might experience neurotic guilt. The admission of sin was and remains an essential element of salvation. The joyful carols we sing during this season echo this reality. "Long lay the world, in sin and error pining." "To save us all from Satan's when we had gone astray."

Paradoxically, it is the reality of sin that opens our hearts to salvation. It is the recognition of sin, the acceptance of our human weakness and error, which awakens within us the yearning for the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the paschal mystery. Jesus submitted

to the will of the Father that humankind might be restored to our original innocence and offered himself upon the cross that we might be reconciled to the divine. That mystery is made present again for us this night in this sacred meal. For this night we offer bread that becomes his body, given up for us. This night we take a cup of wine, and it becomes the blood which was shed for us, so that sins might be forgiven. This night the mystery of our salvation is once again celebrated and made known. In this celebration we quake at the implications of mystery.

We finally realize that the change for which we cry out is not some unspecified ambiguity. The change for which we long is the transformation of each individual gathered around this altar. That each of us might move more completely away from sin and darkness of our lives toward the grace and light of the Risen Christ. Our salvation has been accomplished, and yet the path of discipleship requires that each of us individually and as a community embrace more completely that reality.

We embrace that reality when we confront our sinfulness, claim our need for salvation, and in the power of the Spirit act on that salvation. We incarnate that reality when we dare to act as agents of change in our relationships, our homes, and communities. And unlike an ambiguous change called for in our economic and political dialogues, we act for change that is clear and for which have a model. We act that we might assume more completely the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. We act that we might become more clearly the Body of Christ. We act that Kingdom of God might become more fully realized. We act that the change promised us will be ours. A world made new; a reign justice, peace, and fulfillment; a reality of resurrection and hope. And we act ever so humbly, because we know that all of this is only possible through the power of Spirit.

Rev. Joseph Benedict