

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for December 4, 2011

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” Words from the prophet Isaiah in today’s first reading. Words from a loving Father speaking to His children. For the people of Israel, at this time, had been through many trials and quite a lot of suffering. Many of them probably felt abandoned by God, as if they were now orphans all alone. So, God speaks through Isaiah, to provide His children with great words of comfort. God is reminding them, “Do not grow discouraged or pessimistic. I have not forgotten you.”

And God is saying the same thing to us today. For all of us, at one time or another, have experienced discouragement. We all have our moments of pessimistic thinking. Sometimes we experience pessimism because no matter what we do we can't seem to avoid suffering; painful things just keep happening to us and those we love. Terminal illness, loss of employment, a loved one falling away from the Church. These are painful experiences for anyone.

Other times, we experience discouragement because we can't seem to avoid sin; we just keep falling into the same patterns of greed, lust, impatience, and laziness. These too, cause great frustration and can lead us to wondering why God is giving us the grace needed to overcome our sinful tendencies.

And sometimes we experience cynicism and when we look at society and see so much that is wrong, so much injustice, degradation, and violence. It may even seem that God has turned away from humanity and no longer is looking after His creation.

We know that’s not the case though. And today, as we start the Second week of Advent, God is reminding us of this. He is saying that pessimism, discouragement, and cynicism will all come knocking at your door, but don't let them in! He is telling us, “Do not let yourself be afraid, because I am your Lord and Savior, and I have not forgotten about you.”

This is the message of today’s Gospel, where we hear St John the Baptist's voice ring out with hope in the wilderness of pessimism and discouragement: the Lord is coming! It is the message of Isaiah in our first reading, who again, preaches comfort to God's people, reminding us that He is like a shepherd Who gathers the lambs of His flock in His arms. And it is the message of St. Peter in our second reading, as he reminds us that God does not delay His promise, even if that seems to be the case to us. Rather, for God, a thousand years are like a day, and a day is like a thousand years; what seems like a long wait for us is in reality just the blink  
an eye.

God has not forgotten about His people. He has not abandoned us. And He will never abandon us. Rather, He continues to come to us, bringing with Him comfort and hope. As we continue to see the trials, sufferings and sins in our lives and in the world around us, we are faced with the temptations to lose hope and become discouraged. And if we allow ourselves to only focus on the pain that our experience of these things can bring, then this is exactly what will happen to us.

We will become despondent and risk forgetting about God.

So, today, let’s take advantage of the reminder God is offering to us. In fact, this season of Advent is our yearly reminder that God has not forgotten about us, no matter how we may feel. He comes to us, in His time, to bring us His love, His healing and His peace, as He prepares us for His heavenly kingdom. Let us, then, always be prepared to receive the comfort that God, our loving Father, promises to His children.