

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

12/04/11 2 Advent B

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God....

-- The opening lines of our first reading are soothing and reassuring.

They were certainly reassuring to the people who originally heard them.

-- The people of Israel had been exiled from their homeland to Babylon.

They were down in the dumps. It was almost as if the Lord were saying to them, *There, there, it's alright...* kind of like a mother comfort her child who had fallen and she had picked up.

-- But, what is the true meaning of the word "comfort"? In English, we use *comfort* as a type of "warm and fuzzy" word. An example: comfort food is the type of food which makes us feel warm and good inside. We seem to think comfort means we can simply sit and relax, since our needs are taken care of.

-- If we go to the Latin root of the word, though, it has a bit different meaning. Comfort literally means *to lend someone some of your strength*.

-- God's comfort doesn't just pick us up and give us a hug, so to speak. Oh, initially there is that aspect to God's comfort. He picked up the people of Israel from exile and led them back to their land.

-- But he did more than that. He gave them strength for the work ahead. God called his people, once they were back home, to rebuild the temple. More importantly, he called them to rebuild a people who would be faithful to the covenant God had made with them. And God stood beside them in this difficult work.

-- With this meaning of comfort in mind, we can see that the message of John the Baptist was actually a message of comfort. At first glance it doesn't seem to be that to us. Here is a man who lived what most of us would consider a very uncomfortable life.

-- And his message can seem like anything but comfort as he called people to change their lives. But, in the end, he gave them and us the reassurance that God's strength is there for us when we need to change.

-- Just as the people of Israel who returned from exile needed a push to get off their backsides and do God's work, so the call to repentance reminds us that there is work for us to do. God lends us strength to get around to doing it.

-- During this season our secular society gives us the message that we can take comfort by buying nice things for ourselves and our loved ones. Somehow those things are going to make us happy and content.

-- And though society may give a brief nod to the notion of helping those in need (Drop a little money in the Salvation Army bucket at Wal-Mart or buy a toy for a poor family), the main message is that self-indulgence will give us the comfort we deserve.

-- The message of God's Word, though, is quite different. Comfort is not a matter of resting on our laurels, enjoying the so-called good things in life. It means trusting in the God who calls us to a change of heart and mind, but who also gives us the strength to make that change and do his work on earth.

-- In the last couple of decades some notable people have spoken about the spiritual vacuum in American society. That vacuum will not be filled automatically by a better economy or a sharp drop in unemployment, as much as we want these to come about.

-- It can only be filled when we turn to the Lord for true comfort... when we approach the Lord to ask him to lend us some of his strength.

-- God will not fail us—that is why the power of the Holy Spirit is there for us. May we call upon the Spirit to fill our hearts with repentance for our sins and a resolve to follow God more faithfully, with the strength and true comfort that only God himself can provide.