

12/07/14 2 Advent B

-- *Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.* So begins the second part of the Book of Isaiah and our first reading. We all desire a certain amount of comfort in life.

-- But, what type of comfort? Often, we just want to be comfortable. And that's not the type of comfort God is speaking about here. Being comfortable means having a relative lack of conflict in life, having what we need and most of what we want—things like that.

-- It's a real temptation to substitute being comfortable for having God's comfort. I know it is for me. To have a smooth ride through life is really a seductive idea.

-- If we want to understand what God's comfort is all about, we need to look to the Latin roots of comfort: "cum": with and "forte": strength. To give comfort literally means to lend someone your strength.

-- That's what God does for us: God lends us strength. God doesn't shelter us from the challenges and disappointments of life. God doesn't promise us a smooth ride or guarantee we will always have what we desire in life.

-- Rather, God accompanies us on our journey and lends us strength to face the challenges that inevitably will come our way. When we are baptized we no longer walk the rocky road of life alone.

-- I suppose we could say that John the Baptist offered that type of comfort. Most of us would probably not associate "comfort" with the Baptist. We know he made many people feel uncomfortable (especially certain Jewish leaders).

-- But he also preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was a conduit for God's healing power for those who were willing to listen to his message and admit their sins. In that sense, he walked along with those in need of spiritual healing.

-- God continues to offer divine comfort to all who are open to receiving it. He doesn't promise that we will be "comfortable," in the sense we normally understand it.

-- But even the so-called comfortable in life may lack divine comfort. During the economic boom of the mid-90's Forbes (a top financial magazine) ran a long series on why people are not happy even when they have all the "good things" of life.

-- Those "good things" do not bring true happiness. Being comfortable doesn't bring happiness. At most, it may bring temporary contentment.

-- True comfort comes in knowing that, despite our own tendencies to screw things up, to act in a sinful manner, we have a God who is willing to forgive us.

-- This coming Thursday we will celebrate it sacramentally in our Penance Service. In this sacrament God assures us that we are loved despite our sinfulness. I encourage you to consider coming to receive this sacrament.

-- We all have challenges we face in life. Some are in our families, some are work-related, some may involve neighbors or other circumstances in life. They may make us uncomfortable at times.

-- If we put our faith in God, and entrust our lives to Him, making time for prayer and worship, we will still face those challenges. But we will not be facing them alone. We will have God's additional strength, helping us to bear our burdens.

-- That is the comfort our God promises. And it is far more valuable, when all is said and done, than any "comforts" the world can offer us.