

Second Sunday of Advent
December 10, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1)

This weekend, we are greeted again with the person of Saint John the Baptist. Many here have heard the story of this last great prophet whose life and preaching were focused upon preparing the way for the One who was to come after. Although the Gospel of Mark introduces Saint John the Baptist, we can see him pre-figured in the prophetic words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Let us take our time and reflect upon this selection of the Book of Isaiah. We need to consider if the words spoken through Isaiah still provide guidance today.

We begin with a history lesson concerning Isaiah Chapter 40. Isaiah records a voice of one who speaks to a new generation of Jewish people. The previous generation, their parents and grandparents, had suffered the humiliation of allowing the city of Jerusalem to fall in conquest to the Babylonian empire. This, now dead generation, had been warned by God’s holy prophets, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, to repent of the evil they were committing and return to Him. Yet, rather than taking these words to heart, they would choose to listen to others who promised that God would protect them. This protection from God would not be contingent upon their change of hearts. It was solely based upon His promises to their ancestors when they settled in the “Promised Land” after years of forced labor in Egypt. The generation of Jewish refugees, those Isaiah 40 is directed toward, are given words of consolation and hope. They had suffered enough for the sins of their fathers. God would show them His Mercy by seeing to their freedom and the return to their homeland.

Now we ask ourselves: “Does this section of Isaiah have anything to offer us?” Most Christians would respond rather quickly with “Yes”. When asked what the lesson might be, they may point to Saint John the Baptist who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one of God. They may even go so far as to remind us of how the sacrificial action of Jesus upon the Cross, allows us to return home from this land of exile. Both of these points are true and would make for excellent homily reflections. I choose to offer a different approach.

Both the descendants of those who left Egypt and the descendants of those who left Babylon were just that; they were descendants. They were not those earlier generations who had turned away from following God. Those generations, even with their leaders such as Moses, Jeremiah and Isaiah, still chose not to listen. They chose what they wanted and expected God to do His part. In their obstinance, they would suffer and cause their children and grandchildren to suffer. We must ask ourselves: Are we *that* generation? Are our children and grandchildren suffering because of us? I am not implying physical suffering. Rather, are they suffering spiritually? I realize I ask this question to the wrong group of individuals for you are here and they are not. That is my point. They, their children and grandchildren, are not here. It does make one wonder if we are those suffering in spiritual exile as a result of those before us or are we the ones whose actions are leading to the spiritual suffering of the next generation? It does make one wonder.