

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

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

Last Sunday's First Reading was a prayer of lamentation on the part of God's people.

Today we hear God's response: "Fear not ... here is your God ... like a shepherd he feeds his flock ... carrying them in his bosom."

It is a message we long to hear not only in the midst of the current pandemic, but throughout our lives.

As last week St. Paul assured us that "God is faithful," so this week St. Peter reminds us that "the Lord does not delay his promise."

The announcement of the fulfillment of God's promise comes through the voice of the commanding figure of John the Baptist crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

We are told that "John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

His water baptism was a foreshadowing of the coming Messiah's baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Although the season of Advent is not penitential like Lent, it is still a time when we renew our baptismal commitment to discipleship and the ongoing call to conversion.

At the beginning of Mass we prayed:

"Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son.

To "prepare the way of the Lord" involves preparing our hearts to receive him anew by asking ourselves what might hinder us from meeting Christ as he comes to us at this moment of our lives.

There are a lot of "earthly undertakings" that can get in the way of our spiritual preparation during the Advent season.

Decorating ... shopping ... partying ... binge-watching "The Santa Clause" or the Hallmark Channel... not bad things necessarily ...

... but are we also giving time to what St. Peter describes as "waiting for and hastening the day of God"?

He urges us to conduct ourselves "in holiness and devotion."

Can we give a little more time during this Advent season to prayer, reading the Scriptures, making small sacrifices, and performing acts of kindness and charity?

This Christmas - like Thanksgiving - will be different in many ways.

Maybe this year is a call from God to awaken our longing for the "new heavens and a new earth."

Can we see Christmas this year with new eyes and a renewed heart?

I've always held on to a passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians where he writes:

"Learn to value the things that really matter up unto the day of Christ."

Perhaps that can be the lens through which we look back on this strange year of 2020 as we go forward in hope into 2021.

We have had many things taken away from us this year.

What have we learned are the things that really matter?

And what is the comfort God is speaking to us tenderly this Advent?