



Second Sunday of Advent Year B

Homily

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**Saturday 6 December 2020
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As I was reflecting on what I could share with you this morning as we celebrate this Second Sunday of Advent, I decided to look to Pope Francis for some guidance. In doing so I came across a message he gave some years ago which seemed to me to speak very directly into our own experience as we come towards the end of 2020, a year which has been very challenging for all of us. The Pope reflected particularly on this morning's first reading which offers, he says, a message full of hope. It is this message of hope which I would like to share with you this morning. It is a message which, coming as it does in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, comes ultimately from the Lord himself. It is the opening words of this morning's reading which caught Pope Francis's attention: "*Console my people, console them*", says the Lord our God.

At the time, Isaiah's prophecy was directed to a people, the Chosen People, whose long period of exile was about to come to an end. By the hand of the Lord, working in a sense though a most unlikely messenger, the pagan King Cyrus of Persia, the Jewish people were about to be freed to return to their homeland after many years of forced exile because of the conquest of their nation by Babylon. God's words to the prophet Isaiah were meant to be a message of reassurance that, even through their long period of suffering, God had not abandoned his people. The call to bring consolation to them was a call to renew in them their faith in the unfailing presence of God, even in the midst of darkness.

As Christians we know that the Bible does not simply inform us of events that took place in the past. At a deeper level, the Bible is the story of God's constant desire to reveal himself to his people by what he says and what he does. God did free his people, as he had promised to do. God was, and is, faithful.

The consolation which Isaiah was called to offer the people of his time is, therefore, the very same consolation God promises us. At the heart of the story of King Cyrus and the people of Israel lies the deeper truth that God remains a God of consolation today. Sorrow and fear, isolation and estrangement, confusion and even despair, all of which so many of us have experienced throughout the course of this very difficult year, can be replaced with joy, for the Lord himself does guide his people on the way to freedom and salvation.



These words are easy enough to say, and I certainly believe them. But for many people they can easily sound like empty words because this consolation, this hope and this joy seem to be beyond their personal experience and beyond their grasp. And so it is that we must ask ourselves: **How does God do this? When will God do this?** The answer, or at least a big part of the answer, is challenging and even confronting. **How does God do this?** Through us who have been given the gift of faith and are called to share that faith with others? **When will God do this?** When we allow ourselves to be shaped, by God's grace, into the disciples of Jesus that God has called us to be. The simple truth is that God, in a strange and mysterious way, has to a very significant extent bound himself to us. When God wished to console his people he sent Isaiah to be the bearer of that consolation. Thankfully, Isaiah said **"yes"**. When the time had come and God wished to send his Son to us as our saviour, he asked Mary, through the visit of the angel, if she would be the Mother of the Messiah. Thankfully, Mary said **"yes"**. When Jesus on one occasion wished to feed the crowd and had only five loaves of bread and two fish, he multiplied the bread and the fish, but he asked the disciples to distribute the food to the crowds. Thankfully, they said **"yes"**. God seems to make himself dependent on our cooperation in order to bring hope, healing, and life to his people. This is both an enormous responsibility for each one of us, and also an indication of the great dignity we have as human beings and as Christians.

All of this is summed up very beautifully in a famous saying of Saint Teresa of Avila which many of you would know:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

God **is** a God of consolation, of comfort, of promises made and promises fulfilled. But as God has always done in the past so also today God calls and invites people to be the bearers of his divine consolation and comfort. He calls us, and sends us, to be bearers of hope. He needs us, in the words of Saint Teresa, to be the hands, the feet, the eyes and the voice of Jesus, who is the great consoler, the great comforter, the great healer and the very presence of God among us.

It is this presence of God among us that we celebrate each Christmas and for which we are preparing in this season of Advent. If we are to rise to the challenge of being the bearers of God's love to the world in which we live, if we are to be the living signs of Christ among us to our families, our friends and all we meet, then let us be encouraged this year to really welcome Christ into our lives, allow ourselves to be consoled and comforted by him, and open ourselves to the power of his grace shaping us into the disciples he needs us to be. Like the five thousand people who were hungry and who were fed by Jesus and his disciples, our world is full of people who are hungry, not just for food but for love, for compassion, for a welcoming smile and a forgiving heart.



Let us, in the name of Christ, be the ones who bring his love to those in need. Let us be the ones who respond to God's invitation: *Console my people, console them.*