

2 Advent B

December 6, 2020

St. Patrick

Rarely has God's Word spoken with such feeling, with such gentleness. These are the first words which we heard this Advent Sunday from the Prophet Isaiah:

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...”

These are famous words, and for almost three centuries we have heard these words at the very start of George Handel's exquisite *Messiah*. It's performed and sung during Advent every year.

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...”

The chosen people had gone through a horrific trial. For decades they had been exiled to faraway Babylon and forced to work as slaves. Years earlier their beloved city of Jerusalem had been completely destroyed and leveled. Now, they were being allowed to return home. Their exile ended, they could go back home. And God wants to give them hope.

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...”

As you know, a year ago I moved into our rectory, right behind the church. Everything really went smoothly in the move, except for one thing. I couldn't find the box that had the four volumes of my prayer books, called the breviary. Every morning and night, deacons and priests pray from the breviary, praying in praise of God and for the church and world.

The first volume last Advent—well, I prayed through the four weeks with another copy someone had given me. Throughout last Advent I kept searching for *my* Advent prayer book of the breviary. I couldn't find it. You see, it wasn't the book I wanted. No, on the inside page of the Advent breviary was the most valuable possession of mine. And I had lost it.

Maybe three weeks into the start of 2020 I found that Advent copy of the breviary, as well as the other three volumes of the breviary. This year, when I got out the

first volume with the start of Advent...well, I turned to the inside cover and kissed my most prized possession. I could spend this Advent with it.

It was a large post-it note, torn off in half. My mother had written a message on it for herself. For the last ten years of Mom's life, she suffered from Alzheimer's. The post-it note isn't dated, and we didn't find it until after her death. She no doubt wrote it early in her disease, while she could still write. The hand-written message to herself, and to me now, is simple: **"Happy the one who trusts the Lord."** The word "who" was spelled "woo," and the word "trusts" was also misspelled. It showed the effects of the disease.

Mom was in the midst of her exile, and she wrote herself a note, so that she wouldn't forget the message from the Bible: **"Happy the one who trusts the Lord."** She didn't want to forget to trust her God, even as she was in the beginning days of her exile.

Friends: It's my most precious possession. And *this* Advent, I have my breviary back in order to savor Mom's hand-written note, and stare at it, and pray it.

You know, like the chosen people of old when this Isaiah Scripture was written—**"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God!"**—*we're* in the midst of our exile. Last Advent none of us would have imagined how this exile would take shape among us. Oh, the chosen people wanted to go home and hold onto hope. We want to be freed from this exile we are all going through together. Isolated, discouraged if not depressed, we want life and home like we knew them.

"Happy the one who trusts the Lord."

I tend to forget the promise...and need to pray it again and again. I too misspell what trust and hope really mean in the midst of *our* exile. At the very end of this Advent Sunday's reading from Isaiah, it spells out what is worthy of our trust and hope. Listen again: **"O herald of good tidings, lift up your voice and cry out, 'Here is your God!' ...God will feed his flock like a shepherd. God will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep."**

May this be our Advent longing, that God will gather us like lambs into her arms, and press them close to her bosom, her heart—all with a mother's tenderness. Yes, *that* can be our Advent longing.

And, in our exile now, Mom keeps reminding me—perhaps you—that we not forget: **“Happy the one who trusts the Lord.”**

General Intercessions

December 6, 2020

2nd Sunday of Advent

Deacon/Reader: Beforehand, please tell the assembly to respond after each petition, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Strengthen your Church’s vocation to embrace tenderly in her arms the isolated, the poor, the young and the elderly; we pray to you, O Lord—

Clothe our leaders—both governmental and church—in justice, humility, and love; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bless our Diocese of Memphis as we begin our 50th Anniversary Jubilee year. Deepen our faith and hope, and embolden us to live as the Good Samaritan on the Banks of the Mississippi; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bring your healing to all suffering from Covid-19; protect and sustain all who provide medical care and all first responders; give all of us care in protecting others from the coronavirus; and, open up hearts of hope within us all; we pray to you, O Lord—

Embrace in your love all who have died, especially Edith Fox and Beverly daLomba; and all who have died from the coronavirus; we pray to you, O Lord—

