

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent “A Season for Hope”

Fr. Frank Schuster

Our first reading from Isaiah begins, “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” As I shared with you last week, Isaiah is writing during the time of the Babylonian Exile. The Jews were a conquered people exiled to a foreign land. And yet, Isaiah begins our reading this Sunday with, “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” What kind of comfort could possibly be beneficial to his countrymen during those awful times? It wasn’t resignation. It wasn’t self-medication. It wasn’t surrender. What is the comfort Isaiah is referring to? Hope. The comfort he is referring to is hope. For Isaiah, that hope is a voice crying out in the desert saying prepare the way for the Lord.

And we know that this prophesy was fulfilled. The Gospel of St. Mark begins with John the Baptist as the voice crying out in the desert pointing people to Jesus. And I find this message consoling because, this past year has been very hard for so many of us. It feels like we have been led into a desert of sorts. If we hold in our minds for a moment what life was like before the pandemic, how can we not feel somewhat conquered right now, living in a kind of exile? And, I think it is fair to say that our generation has been pretty spoiled when you compare ourselves with the generation that lived through the pandemic of 1918 and WWI. The challenges we are faced with today are not even close to what the Greatest Generation endured during the Great Depression and WW2. Nevertheless, the times we live in today are nevertheless difficult and they awaken in our hearts a need for God’s comfort, a need for God’s closeness, and a need for God’s healing touch. We need that. We can’t do this alone. This is why the Season of Advent is first and foremost a season of hope. We are keeping watch for God’s comfort. And, God will respond by giving us his only begotten Son.

My friends, this is who we are keeping vigil for during this holy season of Advent. The Gospel of Saint Mark begins with a voice crying out in the desert pointing the world to Jesus. We are therefore invited to reflect this second Sunday of Advent: Do our lives point to Jesus? Am I keeping watch for Jesus? Is my faith in Jesus providing comfort to the people around me by the example of my life? What do I need to do this week to prepare the way for the Lord? How can I welcome his love more deeply into my heart so that I can freely share this grace with others? If we pondered these questions and put our faith into action, a wonderful thing just might happen these next couple weeks. Even with everything weighing us down this year, if we keep our gaze on Jesus, we will be surprised by hope.