

1
COME SPIRIT!!

2 Advent B-2003 THEME: Comfort to the People

The season of Advent is refreshing. Our readings speak of hope, of coming joy, of lasting peace. These are themes we need to hear as we conclude one of the more difficult years of our lives. I don't want to go into another long listing of the negatives of 2002, but turmoil in the American Church, the loss of personal income, and the aftermath of 9-11 with the possibility of another war looming are just a few of the situations weighing heavily on us all.

In the face of this, we come to Church and hear, "Comfort, give comfort to my people." God is telling the prophet of the second main section of the Book of Isaiah to preach comfort and consolation to a people who had given up hope. They were exiles in Babylon, a situation due to their own rejection of God, yes, but a knife in the heart of all faithful Hebrews who longed for their homeland. There was no way they were going to beat off their captors. No hope in their solving their problem. No hope, except that which rest in the Lord. They remembered the psalms, like Psalm 39, "And now Lord, what future do I have. You are my only hope." and Psalm 71 "You are my hope, O God, my trust from my youth." They didn't know how, but somehow, God would fulfill their hope, their desire for freedom.

Then Babylon was conquered by Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus realized that he could best solidify his new vast empire by sending the people from the many lands that Babylon had conquered back to their homes re-established as subject nations. The Hebrews were freed. There is no way the people of Israel saw this coming. As far as they were

concerned this was nothing other than a miracle, nothing other than the hand of

COME SPIRIT!!

God.

It was similar to the fall of communism last century. We can give all sorts of economic and political reasons for the fall of communism, but in the end we have to realize that these were just some of the ways that God worked his will for his people.

Comfort, give comfort to my people.

Today I would like to build on the article in this Sunday's bulletin. God knows, sees, understands, cares and heals. There are many problems that we cannot see a solution to, but we have to trust God and be his instrument for healing. For example, I read recently that the Governor wants to tackle the horrible divorce rate in our state, something in the area of 60%. That seems like an insurmountable problem that we can do little to help. But we can and need to help. There are two aspects to this. The first is helping those who are about to marry or who are going through a rough period in their marriage. We have pre-marriage and marital counseling for that with trained priests, deacons and professional counselors.

The second aspect of the problem involves all of us here. This aspect is caring for those people who are hurting due to separation or divorce. We have many people hurting in our parish, suffering because of a marriage that didn't work. Perhaps, many of you are hurting. You certainly didn't plan to enter into a marriage that wouldn't work. But you did and now many of your ideals and dreams have been destroyed. Maybe

the breakup was years ago. Maybe you realize that it was the best thing. You still hurt. Christmas is difficult for you because it brings up memories and losses. You may say that there is

COME SPIRIT!!

nothing that any of us can do for you. I disagree. We can as a Church and as individual extend God's comfort to you by assuring you that this is your home and your family. You are people who are hurting. We hurt with you. We are called upon by the Lord to give comfort to you, people he loves.

Comfort, give comfort to my people.

There are many people in our parish who are angry. Some feel that they have good reason to be angry. Some don't even know why they are angry. But they are still angry. Some are angry with themselves for the situations they have created in their lives: people who have destroyed their marriages or have destroyed their futures with substance abuse. Some are angry because they have not recovered from a vicious attack made on them in the past by a so-called good Christian, quite often their own parents or a close relative or friend. "There is nothing you can do about how people are, Father," some of you might say. Well, we can do something about it, and we are bound to help. Consider this, we Americans have a difficult time dealing with our anger; so we usually transfer it to others. As a result, a vicious cycle continues, and more innocent victims become angry. Christmas is the time of peace. In order to help the angry person find peace, we have to treat him or her with the comfort and consolation of the Lord. We have to be understanding even if we can not determine exactly why the person is so angry. It is hard to be upset with a person who is being kind to you.

The cycle of anger must be stopped. Anger can be defeated with kindness. This is not easy. It is difficult to bring God's comfort to a dying person. But it is far more difficult to bring his consolation and understanding to an angry person.
On COME SPIRIT!!

Christmas Day many people come to our parish who do not come to Church regularly because they are angry. That is why everyone, regular parishioner and once a year attendees need to be greeted with kindness, a smile, and a sincere welcome into our worshipping community.

Comfort, give comfort to my people.

On Saturday our parish bereavement support group, New Beginnings, held what has become an annual talk: coping with the holidays. Those of us who have so much to be busy about might forget that there are some among us who see our activity as a blessing that they no longer enjoy. They no longer have special ones to make a Christmas for. Some of you have lost loved ones this year or in past years. Christmas is difficult. People who have lost a child have a terrible time getting through the holidays. They never get over their loss. It has become part of their lives, part of whom they are. Many of you are hurting in this way. Some of you might say, "Father there is nothing you or anyone can do. We just have to grin and bear it." Well, again, I disagree. If God is our comfort and consolation, and he is, and if we are extensions of his presence, and we are, then we can bring his comfort to you by responding in love and care to your sadness and thereby by admitting you into our joy, his joy.

Comfort, give comfort to my people.

In today's Gospel we remember the promise of John the Baptist: one would come who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. That one is Jesus Christ. We have been baptized with his Spirit. Therefore, we can bring his presence, his love, his comfort and his consolation, his very Spirit to his hurting people. His Spirit will work through us this Advent and this Christmas.

COME SPIRIT!!

We don't know how God will complete his plan for his loved ones, among whom are those suffering from divorce, anger and death, but somehow he will deliver them from their seemingly impossible situations. God's plan always works. We have a part in his plan. We are the vehicles, the people through whom He works his plans.

Today's readings are beautifully positive. They tell us about God's love and his call to us to share in his peace. They tell us that the Lord want us to join him in bringing his peace to others.

The Lord calls upon us today, "Comfort, bring comfort to my people.