

Homily of Second Sunday of Advent Year B, 2023

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:9-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

Today, we light the second purple candle called the candle of peace. During the second week of our Advent journey, we pray for peace in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities, in our society, in our church, in our country, and in our world. The anger, disagreements, conflicts, fights, and wars everywhere are a clear sign that peace is lacking in many hearts and many places. The more the world claims to have developed, the more discontent, and the more aggressive the world becomes. Jesus Christ, whose birthday we are preparing to celebrate, is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Today's Psalm says, "He proclaims peace to his people" (Psalm 85:9). We pray that we do not resist the peace he proclaims. May we receive his peace and share it around. Amen.

There are people who are peace resistant and people who are not channels of peace. These people's Christianity and Christmas celebration are merely superficial. There are people who stir up crises, and people who enable conflicts. They are ungodly and antichrists. When Jesus says, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9); does it not also mean, "Cursed are the crises makers for they will be called children of the Evil One"? Does not Isaiah prophesy, "Happy the just, it shall go well with them, the fruit of their works they will eat. Woe to the wicked! It will go ill with them, with the work of their hands they will be repaid"? (Isaiah 3:10-11).

The psalmist continues, "Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss" (Psalm 85:11). O Lord, let there be kindness (fairness), truth, and justice that we may experience your peace; for without fairness, truth, justice, there cannot be peace! The Vatican II maintains that peace is a fruit of justice and love (*Gadium et Spes*, No. 78). The failure of fairness, truth, and justice is the main cause of misunderstandings, conflicts, and sufferings all over the place. We pray for the conversion of men and women of ungodly hearts.

The first reading from Prophet Isaiah begins with the following words of consolation, "Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated..." (Isaiah 40:1-2). Isaiah continues: "Here is your God! He comes with power, the Lord God, who rules by his strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd, he feeds his flock; in his arm, he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care" (Isaiah 40:10-11). These words of consolation were given to the Israelites in exile in Babylon. At that time, many of them had lost hope that they would ever return to their homeland. Isaiah encouraged them not to lose hope. He assured them that their suffering was at an end. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when God used the Persian pagan king, Cyrus, to set the people of Israel free and have them return to their homeland.

It is our prayer that these words of consolation come to fulfillment in our time. It is our prayer that we are freed from our various 'exiles': our sufferings, our difficulties, our afflictions.

The first reading, further, puts us in the spirit of Advent. The reading invites us to identify in our lives, valleys to be filled in, mountains and hills to be made low, rough and rugged land to be made plain. Valleys, mountains, hills, rough and rugged land are our former ways and areas for repentance, areas for reconciliation, and areas for surrendering to God. If we do these, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed in us, as Isaiah prophesies.

The gospel reading tells us that when John the Baptist preached the message of repentance, people of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem acknowledged their sins and went to him for baptism. In the same way, we are invited to accept the message of repentance and be ('baptized') renewed in the Holy Spirit. Such renewal is the reveling of the glory of Lord in Isaiah's prophecy.

St. Peter reminds us in the second reading that the Lord is patient with us, “not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” God, in his goodness and mercy, does not treat us according to our sins and mistakes (Psalm 103:10). He gives us opportunities to learn our lessons, come to our senses, mend our ways, and be saved. May we not waste such opportunities.

This crises-ridden generation claims to know everything and have everything but have no peace. What is the value of what we know and what we have if we have no peace? Today, as we light the candle of peace, we pray that this generation and all of us may accept the peace of Christ that the world cannot give (John 14:27); the peace that surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:17). Amen.

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