

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

December 10th

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### The Christian Soul Is the Everlasting Jerusalem

The first words of today's First Reading are for us: "Comfort, give comfort to my people."

That prophecy was directed to "Jerusalem," but in today's Readings we find many different Jerusalem's, and one is more important than all the rest. A first Jerusalem is the city that was Israel's ancient capital. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, that city was in ruins, because the Jews, God's Chosen People, had been conquered and exiled by the Babylonians. The prophet is telling those exiles that God has not forgotten about them, that he will bring them home to Jerusalem. And God did bring them back. This wonderful deed from the past can comfort us in our troubles today, reminding us of God's power and goodness. A second Jerusalem is the Jerusalem still to come. Today's Second Reading turns our attention in this direction. It reminds us that Jesus will come again, bringing his Kingdom to fulfillment, and creating a new heaven and a new earth, in which God will wipe away every tear. Our true Shepard, leading us home. Looking forward to that gives us great comfort, because it shows us that our sufferings here on earth have a purpose, and that they will not last forever. In today's Gospel we find a third Jerusalem. John the Baptist addresses his prophecy to "all the inhabitants of Jerusalem," to individual people, like you and me. God's perspective, every Christian soul is a sacred city, a holy Jerusalem. This is the most important Jerusalem; the everlasting Jerusalem. This Christmas, Jesus wants to make a fresh entry there, bringing each of us, each of our souls, new gifts of wisdom and grace. This too should bring us comfort: God hasn't forgotten about each one of us; he knows what we're going through; he has a plan for us; he is guiding us towards the wisdom and fulfillment we yearn for. If only we would remember that Jesus is the hope of this world - And, as John the Baptist stressed, it is up to each one of us to prepare our inner Jerusalem for his arrival this Christmas. During the Roman Empire, rulers rode from city to city for the purpose of official visitations. Their appearance, called "parousia" [pah- RUE-see-ya], or "epiphany" was a great event often preceded by months of preparation. Christ is our Emperor, and this Christmas, he wants to make a special visit to our souls; Advent is our preparation time. Many of historic sites and monuments in the city of Rome are, even today, labeled with marble plaques listing the name of a pope and date. Many times, these dates refer to special Jubilee years in which the popes invited Christians throughout the world to come on pilgrimage to Rome. In preparation for those Jubilees, they would take on a series of beautification projects: building up run-down parts of the city; cleaning up dirty marble monuments; or even constructing new churches. For the great Jubilee of the year 2000, Pope John Paul II continued this tradition. Among other things, he cleaned the facades of all the major basilicas, many of which were almost black from a century of automobile exhaust. Today's Gospel is inviting us to look into our souls and find a beautification project that will help welcome our King this Christmas.

In 1525 Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, came to visit the pope in Rome. In his honor, the pope commissioned the greatest living artist, Michelangelo, to completely redesign the

ancient plaza and buildings that stood on Rome's Capitol Hill. To this day that plaza is considered one of the most stunning city squares in all of Europe, and maybe even the world. On Christmas, through the liturgy, we are expecting the arrival of an Emperor much grander than Charles V. During these weeks we have an opportunity to prepare a beautiful plaza for him in the Jerusalem of our hearts. God has not forgotten about us, and he never will; this is the source of our comfort and courage amidst life's trials. And he wants to come into the Jerusalem of our souls with fresh blessings this Christmas.

According to the prophet Isaiah, there are two things we can do to get ready to receive those blessings: to fill in every valley and to make low every mountain. The valleys stand for our sins of omission, the things we should be doing but aren't.

For example, if we aren't spending quality time with our family, we need to fill in that valley. If we aren't spending at least a few minutes each day in prayer with God, we need to fill in that valley. If we aren't going regularly to confession to rejuvenate our souls with God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness, we need to fill in that valley. The mountains are the selfish and sinful habits that we have built up; the sins of commission. If we like to gossip and spread criticism, we need to tear down that mountain.

If we are leading a double life, indulging in hidden sins or lies that are poisoning our souls, we need to lay low that mountain. If we are arrogantly treating our colleagues, teammates, or family members like lower class people, we need to get rid of that mountain. The mountains and valleys inhibit God's grace from traveling into our hearts; they are roadblocks that keep out God's mercy, peace, and wisdom. Advent is the season to smooth out and clear up the roads to our hearts. Christ wants to help us do that, as he will prove again during today's Mass. Let his grace comfort you when we receive him in Holy Communion and remember he is the God of all people! Promise him you will not only build up the valleys and tear down the mountains in your lives, but that you will work to give comfort to his people while we are on this earth.