

Readings

Is 40:1-5, 9-11

Ps 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14

2 Pt 3:8-14

Mk 1:1-8

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In a document of the American Bishops entitled *Fulfilled in your Hearing*, it states that the homily is “*a **scriptural interpretation** of human existence, which enables a community to recognize **God’s active presence**, (in order) to respond to that presence, in faith, through liturgical word and gesture, and **beyond** the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the gospel.*”

(n.29)

To assist us in recognizing God’s active presence, let us use our imagination for a moment, as we consider the readings we just heard. Close your eyes (if you wish) and consider **what** in your life means the **most** to you: your family, your community, your parish, your country, your job, or your title? It could be almost anything that gives you grounding, and is meaningful in a very profound way. And imagine **what** it would be like for you to lose access to that which is of the greatest value for you.

For ancient Judah, nothing held **more** value than the temple in Jerusalem, not even the city itself, **where**, they believed, God had chosen to dwell with them. When the land was conquered by the Babylonians, in the 6th century B.C., the temple was reduced to rubble, and much of the population was sent into exile. They had no way of knowing how long this dire situation would last.

As the older exiles aged, and died, their children and grandchildren held onto the fading memories passed down to them, and to the hope that their land would be restored to them, and that

whatever sins they committed, that separated them from God's promises, would be forgiven them. It is into **this** situation, that the prophet Isaiah was sent to bring them **God's** comfort. "*Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.*"

It is to **Jerusalem in exile**, that Isaiah addressed his message. Israel's earlier failed alliances with regional earthly powers, their tainted worship, their neglect of the poor among them – these were the things that **separated** them from God. Now, they were in dire need of a message of renewal and hope. Beginning with chapter 40 of Isaiah, (from which we heard today), we hear the message that the Lord is going to go before them, and lead them back to Jerusalem, and to the **former** intimacy of their covenant relationship with God.

When Isaiah cries out: "*In the desert prepare the way of the Lord,*" any **faithful** Jew would **recognize** the *desert*, as the **original place of courtship** between God and the Hebrew people. As foreboding as the memory of the desert was for the Israelites, it was the **original** place of "**divine encounter**" and "**covenant love.**"

The desert experience was **consistently** the *geographical* location, that provided a constant **place** of renewal in the biblical world and story. Scripturally speaking then, it is **imperative** that **everyone** must pass through a "desert" in order to be **renewed**, and in order to come **closer** to God.

Whether we believe it or not, the isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, provided for us a couple of years ago, should have afforded all of us another opportunity **to hear, and listen to the Good News** from a totally **different** vantage point than we have been accustomed to in recent times.

Perhaps the "COVID-19 **desert**" experience had encouraged us (or maybe a better choice of words would be **forced us**) to reflect upon the **benefit** of the desert experience of our lives, and come to realize how God was "comforting" us, and tenderly communicating with us (if we let him)

at that time. It is **not** an *accident* that we often find ourselves **where** we do **not** want to be, or where things are out of **our** control, **but** it may be a **place** that leads us to realize God's **goodness** (despite the painful challenge).

Perhaps today, on this second Sunday of Advent, in the year 2023, the important question we need to ask ourselves is: Did that Covid 19 *desert experience really bring about any **renewal** in us, or bring us **closer** to God, **or** was it just one more experience in our journey to make us **angry**, with God, with ourselves, or with others?*

If anger was our overriding feeling during those dreadful months of isolation, maybe we need to remind ourselves that anger is really ***disguised fear***. If anger is the case, we need to ask ourselves not **what** are we angry about, but **what** are we afraid of?

Were we afraid that God was getting a little too close for comfort? Were we afraid that the renewal that God was **trying** to bring about in us was something that we really were **not** interested in? Were we afraid that the renewal required of us was going to cost **too** much? Did the renewal **God** desired of us **reveal** our **resistance** to changes necessary to become closer to God? Like the Israelites in the desert, would we prefer to go back to slavery in Egypt, which was more comfortable and familiar than the freedom God desires for us?

Perhaps the longing, yearning, or searching we experienced exposed us to the **reality of the restlessness** of which St. Augustine speaks. *Our hearts are restless, until they finally rest in God.* We need to be open to God's voice, listen to the often **uncomfortable messengers** God sends to us.

God wants us to experience this vital **need** for Him, and Him alone, by making us realize that **nothing** created, can fully satisfy us. No crowd of friends, no exciting daily routine, no sense of control or power, will truly satisfy us, **because** we were made **for more** than **this** life has to offer.

The season of Advent is supposed to be a time to renew our commitment to listening to **the voice of the Lord**, the only thing that gives meaning to our life in this desert. The desert voices remind us that **nothing** that we seek in this life to comfort ourselves will ever do so completely, for only our covenant relationship with God can do that.

Let us ask ourselves today, are we like the Israelites in the desert? Are we looking to quickly go back to Egypt, to the comfortable and familiar, where, like the Israelites, they had everything, they wanted, **except freedom from** the distractions that always impede our deeper relationship with the Lord?

As we approach the altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist today, let us ask our Lord for the grace to rest in the desert, for as long as God desires, so that we may be *prepared* to reap the spiritual benefits God so desires to give us.