

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The first words we hear today in the Liturgy of the Word are

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. (Isaiah 40:1)

This should put the lie to the common misunderstanding that the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful and angry God without love! No, our God – the God of *all time* – is a God of love. (Now, that doesn't mean that God doesn't have to correct and chastise us when we do wrong... all good parents have to do that occasionally.) In this context, Isaiah is prophesying about a time in the future (for him... our distant past), when, after Judah has been exiled for 70 years in Babylon, they will be broken and in desperate need of comfort. He gives these words to let the people of God know that He has not forgotten them, and that He will bring them back to Judah and rebuild Jerusalem.

It is also a powerful message of how God will come, Himself, and comfort His people in the person of Jesus. John the Baptist calls out to prepare the way of the Lord, echoing Isaiah's ancient prophecy.

And God speaks this message to us TODAY!

The call to repentance can often be seen as a drudgery, as we have to say "No" to ourselves (and so seemingly to everything that is fun), and turn to God ("oh no... I have to be bored: I have to attend Mass, and pray, and reading the Bible! Can't I spend my time on YouTube?!"). I prefer to think of it this way: the word repentance comes from the Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means "going beyond the mind." *Metanoia*, or repentance means that we have to get out of ourselves, and the tiny, itty-bitsy, wee little kingdoms that we create for ourselves, and enter the vast, huge and incredible Kingdom of God!

The tiny kingdoms we create, while allowing us to be ruler of our domain, leave us *empty*. When everything is about us, when we are the sole arbiter of right and wrong, good and bad ("for me"), we end up left without real meaning or purpose. Yes, we can say we have purpose, trying to create direction for our lives, but in the end, if my world is dependent solely on me, then there's no reason anyone else would find me important. *And I'm really not enough for me.* We were made for community. We were made for love. We were made to be loved and to love others. True love doesn't point to self, but points outward to the beloved with self-sacrifice. We need something beyond ourselves or else we are left empty.

Repentance is a call to be embraced by the Truth of God – His love, crying out that we were made for more. Each of us truly has a purpose, an objective purpose which is greater than ourselves. We were created for greatness, for holiness. We were created to love and be loved. We may not like our particular calling – the daily grind can sometimes get to us – but if we embrace our call, it will ultimately leave us greater and more fulfilled than we ever could have been in our own imaginary kingdoms.

I think this may be why we feel such a deep existential loneliness in our society right now! Without embracing Truth – Truth as an objective reality, outside of my own personal understanding – we can easily fall for the lies. What lies? The lies that come from the emptiness. You may have heard them in the back of your mind. Several common ones come immediately to mind: I'm worthless, I'm ugly, I'm fat, I'm unwanted, I'm completely unloveable, I'm unloved by anyone, I'm a fraud, I'm stupid, I'm broken-goods, I'm tainted. These lies can drive our lives. When shame and self-hatred enter in, the lies have power!

So what is the Truth? **You are loved!** You were made in the image and likeness of God! You were CHOSEN by God – not as an after-thought, but as God's **FIRST CHOICE!** This is the comfort God wants to speak to you today! This is the *metanoia*, the repentance that must happen in us – turning away from the little kingdoms which lead only to emptiness and meaninglessness – and turning to the Truth of God's Kingdom, which speaks words of love. In God's kingdom, we are not the Rulers, it is true, but we are daughters and sons of the King!

Let us give our hearts to Almighty God and ask Him to speak truth to our hearts! As the song goes, "Here's my heart, Lord. Speak what is true." When we do, we will find His comfort overwhelms our emptiness, His Truth will pierce through the lies!