

We are now in the second Sunday in Advent and the theme for our meditation is, "Through Holy Scripture God gives encouragement and hope." How does God's word give us encouragement and hope? God's word speaks to us as we read it and meditate on it. It is the primary means through which God speaks to his people. When we speak with God we communicate to him through prayer and when God speaks to us he first and foremost speaks to us through his word. God's word is his instruction manual to us and therefore we are to read it daily in order to find direction for our lives. It also gives us encouragement and hope. God's word guides and directs in the midst of confusing and competing voices that we hear all around us.

In the passage read to us from the book of the prophet Isaiah we notice three key things that God's word does for the people of Judah who were in exile in Babylon. They had been there for 70 years and had served their due punishment and now God was going to comfort them. The first aspect that we see about God's word is – God's word comforts us in the midst of difficult situations. The second aspect is – God's word gives us a hope for a new beginning. And finally we see the fickleness of human faithfulness and the surety of God's word.

God speaks saying, 'Comfort, comfort my people'. He is addressing the people of the exile through his prophet Isaiah. The word comfort is repeated twice to show the intensity with which God wants to comfort his people who are in exile. They had paid the price for all their sins and now God is wooing them back to himself and therefore says, "Speak tenderly to her." Their sin had been paid for and their time of hard service of punishment was over. Sin always has to be paid for and therefore we see in the New Testament that Jesus paid for our sins not with silver or gold but by his precious blood. God continues to comfort us because he is a God of compassion and he understands our struggles and our sinfulness and therefore is ready to help us when we cry out to him. God's word therefore encourages us to come to him.

The second thing that we notice is that God's word gives us a hope for a new beginning. In the Isaianic passage one of the voices cries out to prepare the way of the Lord. In order to do this, there needed to be a highway for God where every valley would be filled up and every hill would be made low. The prophet shows that the Yahweh would return with the exiles from Babylon leading them home. The creation of a highway or to make a straight path is to make a road in which you can travel fast without any disturbance or roadblocks. That is how it will be when the exiles return. Yahweh also says that his glory will be revealed to the whole world. The voice also proclaims the trustworthiness of the God's word. The Lord has a plan of bringing his word and salvation to the people of Judah and the whole world. The immediate context is the saving of Judah and returning them back to their land, but the long term plan is for the whole world. From this we know that Yahweh was giving the people of Judah a new beginning with their sins forgiven. The hope is that with this new start they will be faithful to him. God continues to give each one of us new beginning so that we may remain faithful to him. The prophet also reminds us that God's word can be trusted completely as it was the same word which was involved in the creation of the world.

In the final section a third voice cries out and tells us about the fickleness of human faithfulness and the surety of God's word. The voice says that all people are like grass and their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. In other words, just like grass and flowers live a short time so too human faithfulness is fickle and temporary. The comparison refers to our moral and spiritual unreliability. In spite of all the God has done for us we are still unfaithful. We become morally lax and fall back into sin because of our sinful nature.

We all are put through trials and temptations but we are called to stand firm in the midst of it. However, we as the people of God too fail like the people of the world. In contrast to this God's word endures forever. God's word continues to encourage us and gives us hope. We are called to respond with faith and in faithfulness. May God truly help us through his word to stand firm to the end.