



# Advent Reflection

Day #8

Sunday, December 6

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

Like many, I get very nostalgic this time of year as Christmastime approaches, but especially on today's celebration of the Feast of St. Nicholas, which fondly brings me back to magical years growing up in Europe. I probably was no more than ten years old, when we were all-packed into the family car heading to my Nonna's house to celebrate Thanksgiving with the extended family. Once on the highway, my father, who had been very quiet up until then, snuffed out the cigarette he had been puffing and sheepishly announced he had gotten a promotion, however, there was a catch.

The color and the smile on my mother's face soon drained as Dad revealed the caveat which was that we would have to quickly pack all our things, sell the house and move to a very small town in Northern Belgium for an unspecified amount of time. My mother, who is not a very big fan of any type of change, sobbed inconsolably for the next half hour until we arrived at our destination. I distinctly remembered my younger sister adding to the disquiet by fretting, that with Christmas so near, how Santa would know that she had moved, and would he be able to go that far out of his way and still deliver her presents. For the next month our lives were topsy-turvy with packing and selling; leaving our warm, cozy home; leaving behind a whole host of close family and friends; leaving our schools, culture, comforts, and even language behind in the big city, to live in a small, mostly farming community on the Dutch/Belgian boarder. We were foreigners in a foreign country, in the middle of nowhere. We were a bit fearful of our future; how we would navigate our new life.

In the first reading today, Isaiah speaks to hurting and fearful people. What they had known of Judah and Jerusalem were no more -others occupied them, the Temple was in ruins, and their friends and family were scattered. They no longer knew where the Holy Presence of God was and were lost and alone without God's protection they thought.

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### Sunday, December 6

Unlike previous prophets who gave voice to grief or condemned failures and infidelity, Isaiah delivers words of comfort and hope, hope for a new and glorious future for Jerusalem. He proclaims that their suffering is about to end, and in fact they should prepare for God to triumphantly lead them back to a new restored Jerusalem. He assures them that the Holy Presence of God had never abandoned them; they need only restore faith and trust in God in their hearts and restore their right-relationship with Him.

In similar fashion, Mark's Gospel proclaims the words spoken by Isaiah, but fulfilled on the lips of John the Baptist. John provides a way to call and gather the people of God and offer a means for them to have a restored relationship with Him through repentance and Baptism; to prepare their hearts and lives for the Holy Presence of God. Only with this type of preparation would they be ready to hear and receive the message of Jesus. Despite our shortcomings and fears, we can always find comfort and tender care in the arms of "the Shepherd" as Isaiah states so poetically. When we accept that comfort, we humbly acknowledge that we need God's care and protection.

In humility, like John the Baptist, we acknowledge our humanness and frailty that puts God in the forefront. During this Advent Season as I prepare for the coming of Jesus, just like the Israelites in joyous hope for the glorious coming of the Lord, I think about all the ways that I am and am not in right-relation with God. I know my shortcomings, forgetfulness, ingratitude, and inattention can be obstacles that I need to overcome. Through daily prayer, reflection on Scripture, attending Mass (even if only online) and Reconciliation, to name just a few, I can repair my fractured relationship and make straight the path for the Lord and me to encounter each other.

Back in Belgium, thankfully, Santa was able to find our address and my sister was pleased with her gifts that year. However, more than that, we were able to overcome our fear of being in a strange land. We trusted that God would help us open our hearts with a humble and adventurous spirit to join the local church, learn the language, embrace new friends, welcome new extended family, and assimilate into the culture, which, you guessed, includes the "Sinterklaas" celebration and many, many fond memories. I can still taste and smell the delicious speculoos cookies and chocolate!

*Reflection by Holy Name Cathedral Parishioner Angelina Rossi*