

ADVENT 2017: A Reflection for Readers

'Console my people, console them'
says your God.
'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem
and call to her
that her time of service is ended,
that her sin is atoned for,
that she has received from the hand of the Lord
double punishment for all her crimes.'

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the wilderness
a way for the Lord.
Make a straight highway for our God
across the desert.
Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
let every cliff become a plain,
and the ridges a valley;
then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
and all mankind shall see it;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Go up on a high mountain,
joyful messenger to Zion.
Shout with a loud voice,
joyful messenger to Jerusalem.
Shout without fear,
say to the towns of Judah,
'Here is your God.'
Here is the Lord coming with power,
his arm subduing all things to him.
The prize of his victory is with him,
his trophies all go before him.
He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms,
holding them against his breast
and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11

This text is proclaimed on the Second Sunday of Advent Year B.
What follows is not an exegetical reflection looking at the meaning of the reading and how it might be conveyed, rather it is using the reading as a starting point to reflect on the ministry of reader and what is involved.

It is suitable for individual or group reflection.

Begin by reading the text a couple of times with a pause for silence in between. Even if you are alone try reading it out loud so you hear the words and feel them on your lips.

- [In a group you may wish to follow a *Lectio Divina* process and reflect on the text of the reading.]
- Underline all the ways that speech is mentioned. What strikes you?
- How much variety of tone do you bring to proclaiming the readings?
 - Do you fill in the valleys?
 - Do you console or shout with a loud voice?
- *Say to the towns of Judah*
 - When you are listening to the readings in the congregation what helps you engage in the text?
- *Prepare a way for the Lord*
 - How do you prepare to read at Mass?
 - What helps you?
- *The mouth of the Lord has spoken* — ‘When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people.’
 - How does this reading speak to you?
 - What does it say to your community?
- *The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.*
 - As well as references to speech this reading is rich in changing geographical images.
 - How might you represent the shape of this reading as a graph or as a line on a piece of paper? Does it begin gently or strongly? Where might the climax be?
- *Shout without fear*
 - The readings at Mass do not need a dramatization, you are not the prophet Isaiah caught on camera, but nor do they deserve a one size fits all approach. Once a reader has taken on board that a variety of tone is helpful and that readings have different shape or flow which need to be conveyed it is finding something in the reading you wish to communicate which will most help engage people in the text.
- *Console my people*
 - Take time to proclaim the reading one more time trying to express in the proclamation some of the insights you have gained.

Prayer

God, who speaks into our hearts
through ancient words spoken in living communities.
Inspire all who serve as readers
to reflect deeply on your word,
so that they may proclaim your truth
and inspire people to follow you in love and mercy.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen

For additional resources in support of Catholic Bible Sunday please see:
www.catholicbiblesunday.org