SECOND SUNDAY OF Advent

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low.

Isaiah 40:3-4

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DECEMBER 10, 2017

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December 10, 2017 • Second Sunday of Advent

The spiritual world is real, every bit as real as the material world. We cannot properly "see" spiritual realities like love, wisdom, and goodness, but we know they exist and influence our lives. We may not be able to point out hatred or sin on a map, but each one of us has encountered those destructive powers. Today's readings testify to a fact we often overlook: sin is real. Sin changes our hearts and has real consequences for our relationships with others. For followers of Christ, acknowledging the reality of sin is not at all depressing. We naturally grow frustrated with ourselves when we sin, but Jesus has a different reaction. In his astonishing mercy, the Lord sees our sin as an occasion to show just how much he loves us—and how he loves us. Jesus Christ takes our own sin upon himself and accepts the punishment—death—that should rightfully come to us.

AIM HIGH

In dying for us, Jesus shattered the limitations of human life. Sin had doomed our earthly existence, but then Jesus died for us and gave us an all-access pass to everlasting life. Saint Peter speaks gently to us about Jesus' gift. Jesus is patient with us, Peter assures us, "not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Knowing that Jesus opened heaven to us, we can aim high each day, striving to avoid sin and do good. Not even the sky is our limit! Peter encourages us further. We are not frightened to hear "the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire," because we are not trapped in the material realm. The salvation of God is real and unifying. We hope one day to live—body and soul—in the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." This is the Lord's plan for us, a plan of deep and lasting peace.

Today's Readings: Is 40:1–5, 9–11; Ps 85:9–10, 11–12, 13–14; 2 Pt 3:4, 6; Mk 1:1–8

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NEWS OF COMFORT

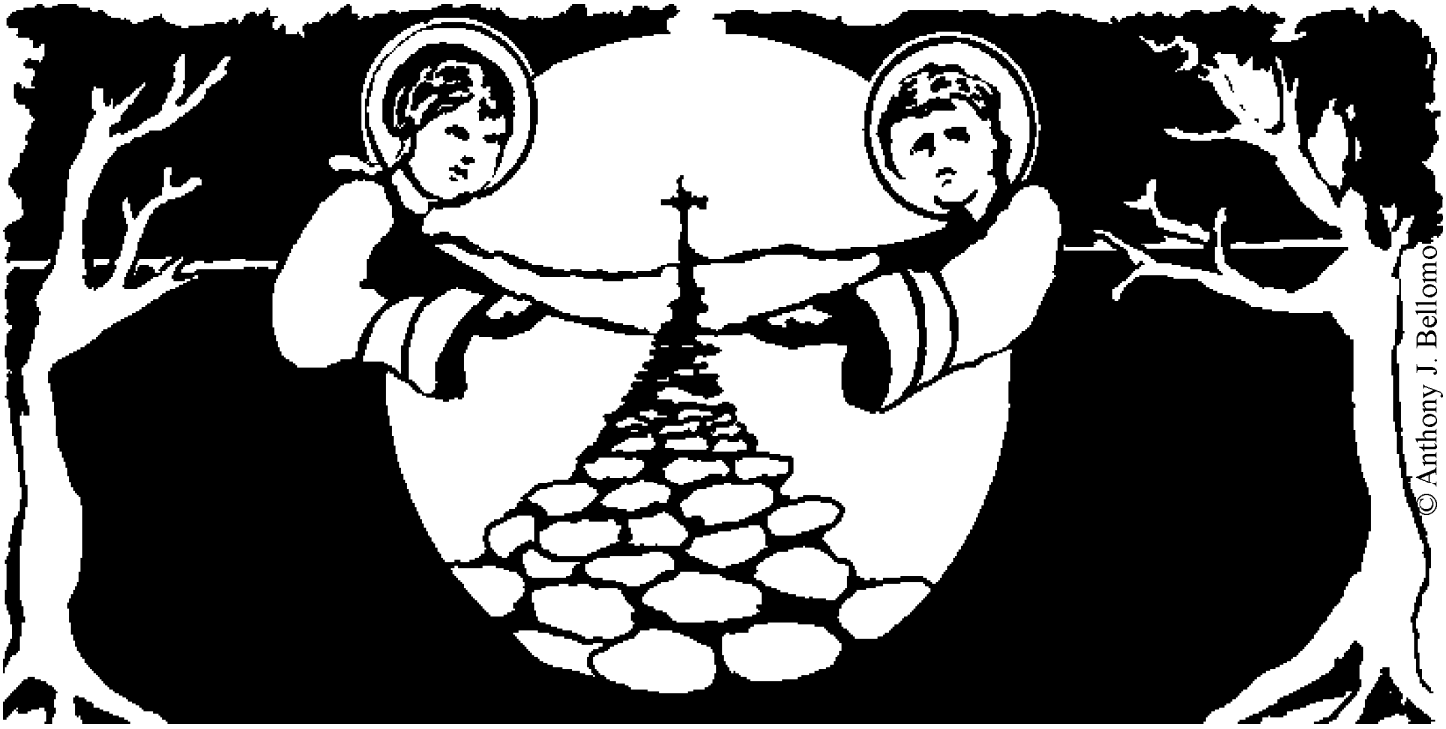
In a time of preparation, much of it having to do with material things, it is good to hear the words of Isaiah, "Comfort, give comfort to my people, / says your God" (Isaiah 40:1). In a time of such stress and rush, when our usual burdens are augmented by piles of Christmas preparations, we can choose to slow down, take some time to heal, and appreciate the enormous gift we are about to receive. Christ, the Son of God, has become one of us, and knows our human limitations. Yet God, even now, is freeing us from the burdens that our inattentiveness to our God and to our deepest inner longings have heaped upon us. The Lord comes, not as a king with mighty armies, but as a shepherd leading the flocks with care and tenderness. Isaiah prophesies good news: our oppression is over, our sins forgiven. The savior we have awaited is coming, not the first time, but in the end times, as our salvation. Copyright (c) J. S. Paluch Co., Inc.

TREASURES FROM OUR TRADITION

Many people think that Saint Francis originated the Christmas crèche, but its origins go far back. The Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome has housed what is said to be relics of the cradle of Jesus since the seventh century. In time, every year during the Christmas season the reliquary (container for relics) was surrounded by an increasingly grand three-dimensional scene of the place of Jesus' birth. Rocks and trees, houses, streams, figurines of villagers going about their daily tasks were all included. It was a very dramatic presentation. If you've ever seen an elaborate model train installation, you get the idea. The proper term for this depiction is presepio, from the Latin word for "surround" or "hedge."

Over the centuries, the custom spread first to churches, and then to aristocratic homes. In Italy, whole chapels are often set aside for the presepio, and it is not unusual to have hundreds of figures. It can sometimes be a challenge to locate the Holy Family amid the crowd, almost like a Where's Waldo? children's book. The oldest surviving presepio is in St. Mary Major and dates from the thirteenth century, although many pieces have been broken or lost. Saint Francis of Assisi took a decidedly creative step in 1233 in the village of Greccio, when he directed his followers to fill a manger with hay and tether an ox and ass nearby. He then invited the villagers to attend Mass outdoors near the crib, the worshipers themselves becoming a living presepio. By the seventeenth century, the tradition was well-established, particularly in Naples, and had a firm hold in Portugal, Spain, and in the Provence region of France. Today, it is not unusual to find presepios with five hundred figures, a vivid reminder of Emmanuel, God-with-us!

--Rev. James Field, Copyright (c) J. S. Paluch Co.

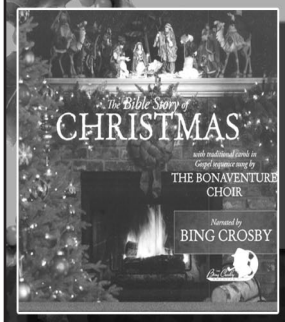


TRADICIONES DE NUESTRA FE

El día 9 de diciembre conmemoramos a san Juan Diego de México. Hace un par de años este indígena mesoamericano fue canonizado por su misión en las apariciones Guadalupanas. Hubo controversia alrededor de su canonización porque había quienes insistían que Juan Diego nunca existió. Después de investigar, el Vaticano decidió que no sólo existió, sino que fue y es santo, digno de ser modelo e intercesor.

Las investigaciones encontraron que el nombre indígena de Juan Diego era Cuauhtlatoatzin, es decir "Águila que habla". Tal vez por este nombre tan significativo fue que los franciscanos lo bautizaron Juan Diego. El nombre Juan recuerda al apóstol, quien escribió el evangelio más místico y cuyo símbolo es el águila. Diego viene del apóstol Santiago o san Diego quien evangelizó a los españoles durante el siglo I. De cualquier manera, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin se convirtió en el "Águila que habla" y anuncia el evangelio místico según Guadalupe, es "Águila que habla" de amor, paz, consuelo y desafío en una tierra conquistada, oprimida y llena de promesa.

--Fray Gilberto Cavazos-Glz, OFM, Copyright (c) J. S. Paluch Co., Inc.



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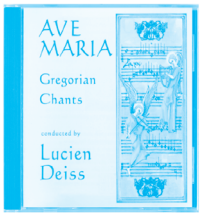

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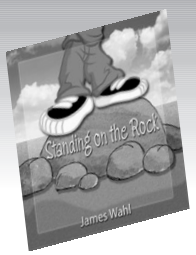

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