



**United Independent Catholic Church
Office of the Presiding Bishop**

A Pastoral Letter

**A Voice Cries Out
Vox Clamantis**

A voice cries out in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord. Who is this who calls us to prepare? While this is a passage from the Gospel of Luke referring to John the Baptist, this is not the voice that I am talking about. This voice rings out every day with a thunderous roar. It is so loud that that sometimes we do not hear it. It gets lost in noise of indifference, fear and despair.

The world is becoming enveloped in darkness; where human lives and human dignity mean nothing. The terrorist attacks in Paris, Lebanon and other areas in the world reflect this darkness. In our own country we have experienced a growth of mass shootings that leaves one to shake his/her head in disbelief. We are in the silly season of the election cycle and voices of hate and indifference raise their ugly message diminishing our country's moral leadership in the world. Even those who call themselves Christian join in the voices that say you believe as we believe or you are a sinner. The darkness of these voices continues to be heard.

While we may not know this there is another voice. This voice speaks of comfort. God tells Isaiah to comfort his people, and to tell his people that their sins are pardoned. Our Jewish ancestors were in the Babylonian captivity at the time of Isaiah writing this message. Isaiah entreated the king of Israel to not envelope Israel into any alliances. Instead the king did not listen to God's messenger and as a result the people of Israel were taken into captivity. The king could only hear the voices of his advisors. The Israelites were in darkness and lived in fear of annihilation. Yet God sent his messengers to reassure the people of Israel that their time of darkness was coming to an end. God promised the people of Israel that he would send them a messiah; someone who would be anointed by God to lead his people into wholeness.

The prophets of the Old Testament continuously spoke of God's love for the people of Israel. However, there were certain demands that God made on his people. Justice and mercy were demanded in order to render any worship acceptable. There were references made in regards to the poor, the widow, the orphan, the aliens, fair wages for work, and attitudes before worship.

We hear from Isaiah "For unto us a child is given, unto us a child is given; and he shall be called wonderful counselor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father the prince of peace." We also hear "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call him Immanuel; God with us"

These passages called for the people to live justly and to expect a savior who would save them from sin and darkness.

A son did come to us and he was the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He called the people of Israel and their religious leaders to follow the prophets in their call to holiness. It was Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who reminded the people of Israel their responsibility to the poor and to live justly. Yet who really heard this message? It was the poor, the outcast, children, tax collectors and sinners. They were empty enough to hear what Jesus was proclaiming. They were open to hear what Jesus demanded of them. They were in darkness and Jesus led them to light. They heard his voice.

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This voice resounds today even in the noise of fear, indifference, and hate. A voice cries out in the desert; prepare the way of the Lord. Who is this voice? It is the poor, those who suffer injustice, the outcast, the vulnerable, and the stranger. They all call out as one voice to live as Jesus demanded. Jesus, through them, calls for us to prepare for his coming. We as Christians believe in Christ's second coming, but he comes to us every day if we hear his voice. He comes to us every day when we stand up for justice, the poor and the outcast. There is much for us to do in order to be ready for his coming. Are we ready? Are we open enough and needy enough for his coming? Are we listening to his voice through the poor? How have we prepared?

Jesus is coming my friends. He stands ready to come into our hearts if we allow him to do so. Let us be ready to celebrate his coming. When we gather for Christmas Services and sing all those wonderful hymns, let us remember that justice precedes good worship.

It is my prayer that as we enter the Christmas Season we enter it with hope and expectations of the fulfillment of the promises of Christ!

Prayerfully,

+Jerry A. Wood Jr.
Servant

Written on the Second Sunday of Advent
In the Year of Our Lord 2015