



5. December 2021

## God's promises are our comfort

**Bar 5:1-9**

*"Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty of God's glory for evermore, wrap the cloak of God's saving justice around you, put the diadem of the Eternal One's glory on your head, for God means to show your splendour to every nation under heaven, and the name God gives you for evermore will be, 'Peace-through-Justice, and Glory-through-Devotion'. Arise, Jerusalem, stand on the heights and turn your eyes to the east: see your children reassembled from west and east at the Holy One's command, rejoicing because God has remembered. Though they left you on foot driven by enemies, now God brings them back to you, carried gloriously, like a royal throne. For God has decreed the flattening of each high mountain, of the everlasting hills, the filling of the valleys to make the ground level so that Israel can walk safely in God's glory. And the forests and every fragrant tree will provide shade for Israel, at God's command; for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with the mercy and saving justice which come from him."*

We draw ever closer to the Feast of the Birth of Christ, and in the readings we hear of God's wonderful promises to Israel. He never leaves His people without a promise to comfort and console them. Amidst the darkness of anguish and persecution, we are to lift up our heads, *"because your liberation is near at hand"* (Lk 21:28). These words - which the Lord Himself addresses to His disciples after warning them about all the tribulations that will come at the End of Time - are an indication of His that stands for us: *"When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand"* (Lk 21:28). It applies for ever and is also a light in this Advent, in the very dark times in which we find ourselves.

We must not allow ourselves to be "swallowed up" by the dynamism of the darkness, by the disasters that threaten us - whatever they may be - but we must place our hope in the Lord. The "hour of grace" which was inaugurated with the coming of Jesus for all mankind is still standing. The door is still wide open, and every person is called to accept God's love, which is offered so tenderly in the Child of Bethlehem. God promises us salvation! Misfortune, on the other hand, is brought upon us ourselves, when we reject God's love and pass by the open door of our Redeemer's Heart. But even then the Lord does not abandon us, but calls us to conversion. He knocks at the door of our heart and, by allowing adverse situations in our life, wants to lead us to reflect. He uses everything - even plagues like the one we are currently experiencing - to turn His children away from the wrong ways.

Words of comfort are spoken over Jerusalem - the beloved and the afflicted. Her destiny is not mourning and misery, nor banishment and bondage; but she is to shine in the glory of the Lord. What other city in the world has ever received such splendour, so that its name resounds to the ends of the earth?

With the coming of Jesus, all the wonderful promises made to Jerusalem will be fulfilled, if only the Jewish people will recognise Him as their Messiah and turn to Him. The Lord Himself is the adornment of this glorious city, which remains forever; He is the crown of the glory of the Eternal.

We, the faithful, can clothe ourselves with these finery, for the knowledge of the Lord is our wisdom. In Him *"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col 2:3). What Israel still longs for is already becoming a reality in those who bow their knees before the Name of Jesus. Precisely in the present darkness, we must not hesitate to bear witness to the richness of our faith. Precisely now, when people experience how insecure their lives are, when they fear a virus, when they trust in false promises and put their hope in people who cannot really help them, the message of Advent becomes all the more important. For it assures us that God has not forgotten us and that He Himself is coming to meet us. When people are touched by the love of the Lord, they will rejoice in Him and true happiness will enter their hearts.

We must not allow ourselves to be subjugated by the shadow that currently hangs over humanity, nor must we allow the darkness of this time to penetrate our minds and hearts. Nor can we leave people to themselves. It is good that they are resisting restrictions on their freedom, and that - as is happening in Austria these days - they are peacefully expressing their disagreement with compulsory vaccination. Some Austrians have understood that God's assistance is necessary, and now frequently pray the Holy Rosary in public places. Please, let us support them every day with our prayers! Their struggle is not only for their own country, but also for other nations.

Ultimately, however, what is decisive in this whole crisis is that people convert, that they accept God's love and change their lives. Then the shadow will also be lifted and the light of Jesus' coming into the world will shine. If they are converted, it will be a homecoming. Now, for that to happen, it also requires our witness, with full conviction, with our eyes fixed on the Birth of the Lord and His glorious Return at the End of Time.