

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

Don't weaken the power of Isaiah's words by holding back on these striking images.

The text consists of couplets that repeat in the second line what was said in the first. To avoid sounding redundant, increase energy from the first to the second line.

Remember, you are speaking these words as if to survivors of a great ordeal. Let them soothe and comfort.

God is promising to do the impossible, so speak with authority, but also with persuasive love.

Jerusalem is depicted as a nursing mother; in short order, God appropriates that same image.

The final lines speak of the future. Speak slowly and with great conviction that "heart" and "bodies" will be transformed by the Lord's "power."

LECTIONARY #102

READING I Isaiah 66:10-14c

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her,
all you who love her;
exult, exult with her,
all you who were mourning over her!

Oh, that you may suck fully
of the milk of her comfort,
that you may nurse with delight
at her abundant breasts!

For thus says the LORD:

Lo, I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms,
and fondled in her lap;
as a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you;
in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort.

When you see this, your heart shall rejoice
and your bodies flourish like the grass;
the LORD's power shall be known to his servants.

READING I

In the prophecy from Isaiah, the Lord speaks to people newly returned, or perhaps still on the way home, from exile in Babylon. Upon their return, they found their beloved Jerusalem, including the Temple, in ruins. While they are mourning this bleak reality, God urges them to rejoice in the midst of their present sorrow because of what God will do for Jerusalem in the future. God offers them one of the most comforting and reassuring of images: a mother nursing her child. The verses just before those we read today describe Jerusalem giving birth,

and now she will care for her offspring. The returned exiles are about to begin their life as those newly born.

The image of Mother Jerusalem is replete with words and phrases that emphasize the extent of God's generosity; you will "suck fully" on "abundant breasts"; God will "spread prosperity" like a river, and wealth of nations like an "overflowing torrent." In the Hebrew text, the word we hear as "prosperity" is *shalom*, a rich concept that means wholeness, harmony, and completeness. Jerusalem, a name associated

with *shalom*, will manifest the harmony that its name signifies.

The abundance that God promises is accompanied by Mother Jerusalem's tenderness: "you will be carried in her arms and fondled in her lap." The image expresses the constant care and delight that the mother takes in her children, surrounding her child with affection. In every way, the Jerusalem of the future is cause for rejoicing in the present. All of Jerusalem's children will respond with exultation and delight.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20 (1)

R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth;
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.

Say to God, "How tremendous are
your deeds!"

"Let all on earth worship and sing praise
to you,
sing praise to your name!"
Come and see the works of God,
his tremendous deeds among the children
of Adam.

He changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot;
therefore let us rejoice in him.
He rules by his might forever.

Hear now, all you who fear God,
while I declare what he has done for me.
Blessed be God who refused me not
my prayer or his kindness!

Galatians = guh-LAY-shuhnz

This is the fifth consecutive week we read from Galatians. Here, Paul is both teacher and a healer, so his tone cannot be abrasive.

Pause after "boast" and then forcefully state of what one *can* boast—the Cross of Christ!

Don't stress what doesn't matter, but what does—"a new creation." Your listeners are that new creation!

This is a *prayer* for peace for all who follow Christ.

Don't let these words sound whining or bragging; Paul considers his suffering a privilege.

End with a prayer that sounds like a prayer.

READING II Galatians 6:14-18

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians

Brothers and sisters:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation.

Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule and to the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

After such a fulsome portrait of Mother Jerusalem, the prophet adds to the motherhood image. Now God is presented as a mother comforting her children. The abundance of Mother Jerusalem is possible only because God also acts as a mother, comforting her children. Now the people will rejoice in the motherly comfort offered by the holy city and by their loving God. Then the people's bodies will "flourish like the grass," giving us a concluding image of continued abundance.

READING II In the final verses of his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes to the community in his "own hand" (6:11), giving his concluding remarks a deeply personal tone. Having argued throughout the letter against those who demanded circumcision, Paul summarizes the heart of his Gospel here: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is so immersed in Christ that he can say he is co-crucified with him (2:19), and has died to the world. Although the "world" (*kosmos*) is sometimes a neutral term referring to the earth and its inhabitants, Paul uses the word

here to refer to those in opposition to God, those who reject the cross of Christ. The "world" signifies the old order in contrast to the new creation inaugurated by the cross of Christ. Paul writes further about the new creation in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Those who live in the new creation follow the rule (*kanon*) of the cross of Christ; a *kanon* is a measuring rod, an apt metaphor for measuring how well believers are living