

Comfort My People

Isaiah 40-41

WHAT WE FOUND

Chapter 39 ended with Babylon in the doorway and exile decreed. And God's first word on the far side of the catastrophe is "*Comfort, comfort my people,*" spoken *tenderly*, to the heart, with the covenant pronouns intact: *my people, your God*. When God's discipline has done its work, his next word is not *I told you so*.

A voice cried for a highway in the wilderness, the road planted back in chapter 35, and we discovered that Isaiah 40:3 is the only Old Testament verse all four evangelists pin on the same man: John the Baptist, who pinned it on himself: "*I am the voice*" (John 1:23; CCC 523). St. Augustine gave us the theology: John is the voice, Christ is the Word; a voice sounds and fades, the Word abides, and every witness since has the same vocation. We heard that all flesh is grass and only one thing in the universe is durable: "*the word of our God will stand for ever*" (40:8). And we beheld the God of verses 10-11: the arm that rules is the arm that carries lambs; power and tenderness are one God.

We climbed the incomparability poem, nations like a drop from a bucket, stars called by name with "*not one missing,*" and found it was pastoral all along: the star-counter has not lost your file (40:27). The wings belong to those who *wait*: soaring some days, running others, and on most days the plain grace of walking without fainting (40:31). We also faced the authorship question with open eyes: the Church has defined nothing about how many hands wrote Isaiah, and faithful Catholics hold different views; what is non-negotiable is that all sixty-six chapters are inspired and true, that the book is one canonical scroll (Qumran's great Isaiah scroll preserves the book whole; Sirach 48 and John 12 receive it as Isaiah's), and that the God who names stars can also declare what is to come, the very evidence chapter 41 stakes his deity on; the book later names Cyrus outright (44:28; 45:1).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *Sermon 293, on John the Baptist*

John is the voice, Christ is the Word. A voice sounds for a moment and passes away; the Word it carries abides. John said it in his own idiom: he must increase, I must decrease. Every preacher, catechist, and witness since has the same job description: be a voice that spends itself delivering a Word that lasts.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus • *Second Theological Oration*

To conceive God fully is impossible, St. Gregory teaches, and to comprehend him more impossible still; in Isaiah's idiom, the One who weighs mountains in scales is not weighed by minds. Yet this is adoration, not agnosticism: what we cannot comprehend we can still know, love, and trust, which is exactly where Isaiah's poem lands its exiles.

St. John Paul II • *Inaugural Homily, 1978*

Be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ. Those are the homily's own words; the connection is ours to draw: he had learned under two totalitarian empires what the exiles learned under Babylon, that *fear not* is credible only because of Isaiah's clause, *for I am with you*. Courage, for the Christian, is not a temperament; it is a conclusion drawn from a Presence.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Isaiah 40:1-11 once this week as an Advent of the heart: read it aloud, slowly, and at *Behold your God*, stop and behold.
- Find the youngest, strongest verse-30 person you know who is currently fainting, and be the comfort chapter for them: one message, one coffee, one tenderly spoken word this week.
- Memorize 40:31 and deploy it at the exact moment of your week you usually hit empty. Note what actually happens.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Isaiah 40:31 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 42:1-9 and 45:1-7.

Catechism References From This Session

CCC 523 • CCC 300 • CCC 239