

A reflection for the Second Sunday in Advent: A Mother's Comfort

Sister Barbara E. Reid, O.P. reflects on the readings for December 6, 2020.

I had never experienced the desert until the first time I visited the Holy Land. Having grown up in Michigan, surrounded by the Great Lakes and greenery, I could only imagine what the wilderness might be like. When I finally did experience it, its stark beauty took my breath away. The silence and the vastness of the rolling sand hills helped me understand why God would want to lure Israel into the desert and there speak tenderly to her heart, as the prophet Hosea said (2:14).

With no other distractions or noise, the desert is a splendid place for lovers to revel in one another. But the desert also holds its terrors. You can die if you haven't brought enough water. And there are the dramatic temperature changes—intense heat during the day and bone-chilling cold at night. You have to have proper protection for both.

And then there are nocturnal animals. As we camped out in the open, I worried that a scorpion could find a warm bed in my hiking shoes. Or worse, that a camel would trample us if it came in search of a granola bar we had forgotten to store in our bus. Then there is the danger of flash flooding when a little bit of rain can become a rushing torrent in a wadi that turns a dry riverbed into a death trap.

Many of us now find ourselves in a kind of desert space from the isolation, fear, and grief we are experiencing during the deadly COVID pandemic. If you are an introvert like me, you may have welcomed at first the emptier calendar and the quiet space. But now, what might have started as a honeymoon has deteriorated into a terrifying place that we desperately seek to leave.

In today's first reading, a voice cries out in the desert, bringing hope and comfort to the shattered exiles. Some of them thought the exile was a

punishment from God for their sins. But when Isaiah speaks of the “strong arm” of the Holy One, it is not raised to inflict punishment, but is one that has the strength to gather up all the lost lambs, to hold them close to God’s breast, and gently lead them home. When many of us have been touch deprived in these last months, unable even to hold the hand of a sick or dying loved one, Isaiah’s image of God holding us to her breast, does, indeed, bring comfort.

In the gospel for today, John the Baptist echoes the cry of Isaiah, announcing that there is a new way out of emptiness and misery. God picks us up and wraps us round with love that comes through letting divine forgiveness wash over us and then follow Jesus.

At the end of this week, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who gives us another assurance of God’s tender care for the most vulnerable and deserted. Let her wrap you in her rose-filled cloak and bring with you anyone you know who feels deserted and let her speak words of comfort to you as she did to Juan Diego: “Let not your heart be disturbed. Are you not under my protection?”