

Christmas 2009

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In our culture, if you call someone a “prophet,” we think that they can see the future and predict events before they occur. However, in Scripture, being a prophet meant something different. It referred to those who looked at the world around them and proclaimed a message directing people toward God.

Sometimes, prophets gave people bad news. When the people of Israel turned their backs on God, prophets like Jeremiah warned them to change their lives. Part of the message occasionally involved changing the names of people and places as a sign of God’s unhappiness.

Sometimes, too, prophets gave encouragement to people when they were down. In the first reading on Christmas Eve, we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah to the Jews as they began to return to their homes after the long exile in Babylon. Earlier, they had been chastised, given the name “Forsaken” and their land called “Desolate,” because they had forgotten their covenant with God. However, after two generations of slavery, the Jews are allowed to return home, only to see their nation destroyed.

In many ways, we are going through the same thing today, feeling the same way as the Jews did. Some people have lost their homes and many have lost their jobs. For everyone, it seems, life is a struggle because greed and selfishness led many to turn their backs on God. We know now how much we need God’s love, and are like a repentant child who needs to hear again the soothing, reassuring voice of his mother or father.

“You shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the Lord.... No more shall men call you ‘Forsaken’ or your land ‘Desolate.’ But you shall be called ‘My Delight’ and your land ‘Espoused.’ For the Lord delights in you, and makes your land his spouse.” These are the words offered by Isaiah to remind the Jews that God still loves them. Those words open the door to a life beyond their desolation, to a new and greater relationship, far beyond their understanding. It points to the coming of the Messiah who takes away their sins and offers them the promise of eternal life in Heaven.

Jesus’ birth at Christmas becomes the pivotal point in human history because it is the gift of God to his people – all those who came before and all those who come after. It is the irrevocable sign that calls us to faithfulness. However, when we fail and find ourselves in situations like we are in today, it is also a call to hope and a reminder that God still loves us and is faithful to us.

From Forsaken to Faithfulness and from Desolation to a renewed Desire to embrace God’s love, we are being called this Christmas to look past our woes and rededicate ourselves to building the Kingdom of God. That means giving what little we have to those who have less. That means turning to Mass and prayer for strength and patience. That means reaching out to family and friends and welcoming them to our homes and our hearts.

This Christmas, I ask you to join me in looking beyond the material things you’ve lost or kept, and to realize that the measure of true wealth lies in the love of the infant Jesus, and his desire for us to live with him forever.

May God bless you and your family this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Michael P. Driscoll  
Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise, Idaho