

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Isaiah 40:1-2.*

The role of Jerusalem is highly significant for the prophets, as we see here in this verse from Isaiah. It is the city which King David made his capital and to which he brought the Ark of the Covenant, the visible symbol of God's presence with his people. Jerusalem was called to be a faithful city but again and again it is condemned for sinful conduct. Yet its restoration following the destructive exile is promised by Isaiah. The comfort that God will bring is the comfort of forgiveness and rehabilitation. 'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem' is what the Hebrew means here. It is not the conduct of Jerusalem's sinful inhabitants that will have the last word in its story, but the merciful compassion of God.

Part of God's Advent comforting of us is the experience of knowing ourselves to be forgiven and restored. While the secular world and, unfortunately many parts of the Church, are already celebrating Christmas, we do well to remember that Advent is a penitential season. Before we can enter into the celebration we need, first of all, to be restored to our 'right selves' and brought home to the heart of God. Self-examination is an integral part of our Advent preparation. How will we make that journey in the next few days?