

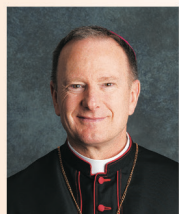
# ADVENT *as a* season of comfort

*“Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.”*

I love to hear these words sung in Handel’s Messiah every year at Advent and Christmas time. I don’t know about you, but I need “comfort” – I need help from the Lord for my own problems, and for the many people in our diocese who worry and are suffering. At this time of year, I gather, read and pray intentionally for each and every intention sent me, and then place the cards in baskets on and under the altar in my bishop’s chapel.



Our Lady of Comfort and Consolation



**BY BISHOP  
MICHAEL C.  
BARBER, SJ**

*Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 2013.*

Some problems can be solved by help from others: financial, medical, legal. Or relationships can be healed through change of heart or forgiveness of sins.

Yet some of our deepest wounds can only be healed by God Himself.

As a Navy chaplain, I was assigned to the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis. We were on a mission underway somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, with 5,000 sailors embarked. One night I was awakened at 3 a.m. by the duty officer who told me to get dressed and come topside.

They took me to a compartment where a 30-year-old sailor was curled up in a ball in the corner, weeping and crying. Two burly chief petty officers were standing there and said, “Chaplain, he’s been like this for an hour, and we don’t know why he is crying. We don’t know what to do. Can you help him?” “I’ll try,” I said, and they left us alone.

I moved my chair over next to the anguished man, put my hand on his shoulder, and tried my

best to comfort him. Inside myself, I was praying hard for him. After 30 minutes or so, he was able to stop a bit, and whispered to me, “Our baby died.” He had received an email from his wife that their infant child had died.

I wish I could raise that child from the dead, like Jesus did. But Jesus did become incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he became a human being like us, born on Christmas Day, to come near to us and comfort us. And the greatest comfort Jesus can give us is to raise us and our loved ones from the dead.

There are three comings of Jesus Christ. The first was “in history,” at his birth in Bethlehem. The second is “right now” today: in the Holy Eucharist, in all the sacraments, in our hearts through hearing the Scriptures, and in the needy person who comes to our St. Vincent de Paul or Catholic Charities looking for

food, clothing or housing. Remember Jesus said: “When you do it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you do it for me.”

The third coming of Jesus will be at the “end of the world” – as He said, “You will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory.”

The three comings go together. That is why the Advent Scripture readings at Mass are prophecies from Isaiah of his first coming, and references by Jesus Himself and the Book of Revelation about His final coming.

Friends, at this Advent and Christmas time, if you want to experience Comfort, give comfort. Participate in Mass and the sacraments. Go to confession and receive Him in Holy Communion. Do something to serve the poor and needy, either in person, or through your alms. May the birth of Our Savior bring you and your families great and lasting comfort. †

“*Friends, at this Advent and Christmas time, if you want to experience Comfort, give comfort.*”