

The image features two lit red candles against a black background. The candle on the right is in the foreground and is lit, with a bright yellow flame and a blue base. The candle on the left is slightly behind and to the side, also lit. The text is overlaid on the candles.

A Different Kind of Advent:

RENEWAL & RESTORATION: ADVENT II

Second Sunday of Advent

We begin the second week of Advent by lighting two candles. The second candle symbolizes God's continued love in Jesus present in all of us and calling us forth to transform the world with that love.

SEE+ In scripture, prophets are more concerned with their people's present experience than with our usual understanding of their foretelling the future. Of course, the future hope and understanding of God's revelation shapes their preaching, but it is more focused on their people's present needs and suffering.

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah tries to lift the flagging spirits of the people of Israel who are in exile in Babylon, feeling abandoned and longing to return home. It begins:

“Comfort, give comfort to my people.”

“Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God.”

The gospel of Mark picks up these words and applies them to John the Baptist.

“Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths.”

What is striking here is how Mark takes the words and images from Isaiah and applies them to what God is doing in his time to lift the flagging spirits of the people. The people in Babylonian exile were not returning home to the way things used to be. God called for a new road to be built that removed all the ruts and rubble that prevented smooth travel home. This road would bring comfort to those who had already suffered enough.

Mark’s words too imply a restoration not to old ways but to something new. The gospel reveals God is reaching out to us not only by sending Jesus but also says clearly that Jesus “ will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” In both cases,

God is restoring people, but not back to an old way of life. God's restoration in Jesus and the Holy Spirit involves an embrace of our renewed dignity of God's unconditional love in everyone and a healing and deepening of our relationship with God and one another.

These words seem particularly poignant this Advent. The pandemic has certainly exposed so many ruts and rubble in the ways we used to do things and some of their unequal and destructive consequences. In the face of these challenges, we need these words from scripture to lift our flagging spirits – and restore us to our true identity. We are challenged this Advent to be attentive to Isaiah and Mark's words and begin the work of healing and restoration of our world.

DISCERN+ (We reflect on the readings for this Second Sunday of Advent and the witness of others involved in restorative justice ministry as a way to listen to their challenge and discern ways they impact our lives and ministries. What are the ways the Scriptures and others'

experiences, words, and stories help us understand what God is inviting us to do?]

Readings for the Second Sunday of Advent:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120620.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11: *"Comfort, give comfort to my people says the Lord"; "Like a shepherd he feeds his flock."*

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14: *"What sort of person ought you to be?"*

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8: *"A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'"*

Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy: Restorative Justice

The *Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy* video below illustrates concrete ways to be restoration and healing in an accompanying ministry. These voices provide insight to how restorative justice embodies Jesus' inclusive ministry.



<https://youtu.be/FNuqrsCviU>

**Another Reflection on restoring the face of Christ
in everyone**

**Reflections on Advent from *The Violence of Love* by St.
Oscar Romero:**

The Christian knows that Christ has been working in humanity for twenty centuries and that the person that is converted to Christ is the new human being that society needs to organize a world according to God's heart.

Advent should admonish us to discover in each brother or sister that we greet, in each friend whose hand we shake, in each beggar who asks for bread, in each worker who wants to use the right to join a union, in each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves, the face of Christ. Then it would not be possible to rob them, to cheat them, to deny them their rights. They are Christ, and whatever is done to them Christ will take as done to himself. That is what Advent is: Christ living among us.

ACT + (Questions for reflection in light of the scriptures and other voices.)

1. What ways do we overlook "Christ living among us?"
2. What do we need to do individually and communally to heal the division, loss, and suffering around us?

3. How can we restore our identity as sons and daughters of a loving God and work to create a transformed world that emerges from that identity?
4. What paths in our world need to be made smooth to build a wide highway, including all?
5. How do we bring comfort and healing to others in these challenging times?