

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent (B)

11/30/2014

Our first reading from the prophet **Isaiah** is unusual. It is a piece written toward the end of **Israel's** exile in **Persia**. Many are discouraged. Many aren't completely sure that they want to leave **Persia**... even though their rights are limited. Many have married **Persian** men and women. Many fear that they will have to start over again by leaving **Persia**. Many feel beaten, bruised, and forgotten.

Somehow a few know their *first identity*. It isn't their **only identity**. They are wives and husbands, laborers and teachers, fathers and mothers. They are members of the **Jewish** religion, captives of the **Persians**, forgotten by **God**. They are farmers, potters, rabbis, and priests. They are also the **image and likeness of God**.

It is this **image and likeness** that is being remembered in our reading from **Isaiah**. **Nothing** that happens to them - good or bad - can **change** this established **image**. Their **likeness** to this **image**, however, is often lacking.

This is the **human journey**. We have **many identities or likenesses**, but we only have **one first identity or image**. This **image** can never change. It is **God's** gift to us. It is how we are created: as the **image of God**. The difficulty comes with **our ability to forget** or not be **aware - conscious** - that we are the **image of God**. We, instead, **settle** for a **likeness** that is skewed - disfigured - by our **small-self**: the other

**likenesses** that our **egos** develop in order to survive.

**Jesus** repeatedly instructs us to practice living **consciously**. That is, to observe the numerous **likenesses** that our **egos** have acquired or developed - without judgment and with compassion - so that we can **practice** living the **likeness** of our **big-self**. We sometimes call this **daily prayer**.

One of the ways in which we recognize our **first image** is in our unexpected ability to hold seemingly separate and different things **together**. We can live with **another identity** *and* with our **first identity**. We can **practice** living the **likeness of our first image** *and* **practice** living the **many likenesses of our egoic self**. As we do, we learn to **embrace our poverty**: our **inability** to make ourselves live the **likeness of our first image**, because we **know** that the **image of God** is gradually becoming more and more **real** for us. As it does, our lives are **transformed**. Welcome to **Advent**.