

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter it is raining. The ice storm that has been such a devastating force throughout the Southern and Midwest states is now upon us. Fortunately, it is still too warm for the ice to form, but we know it's coming.

At the same time, I am listening to the beginning of Handel's "Messiah." This is not one of the newer recordings that have come out in recent years. No, I am listening to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, directed by Eugene Ormandy; the one that came out in 1969. This was the "Messiah" I grew up with. Every year at Advent this record went onto the turntable and stayed there through Christmas along with the Chipmunk Christmas Album and a few others stacked onto the spindle. We were not very kind to our record albums back then. Of course there is an entire generation of folks asking what record albums and turntables are. In fact, I am listening to this old version of the "Messiah" on my computer because I downloaded it (legally) on my computer.

This production of Handel's "Messiah" always fills my soul with a profoundly joyful emotion. As a child growing up I saw something beautiful about the Advent Season every time I heard the Overture give way to that beautiful tenor voice singing, *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."* When I heard that voice it was as if my soul was lifted up to a place where I could hear God call his people to find rest, peace, joy and eternal love. During Advent we are reminded that this is, indeed, what God has always desired for us, that we might know the beauty of salvation in our own day. This gift of eternal life is given in great abundance, but in all the busyness and stress of our own lives we need to hear that voice.

Perhaps God's voice comes to us from the tenor singing, *"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem... and cry unto her that her warfare, is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."* Still the war lingers on in the Holy Land 2700 years after Isaiah spoke these words. Still the world waits for mercy amidst the shameful anguish of sin. And while we wait our lives are crowded with noise, stress and worry. Therefore, we are given this very special weekend in Advent given the name *Gaudete*, which means, rejoice.

Even in all the distress and clamor of our lives, today is a good opportunity for us to consider what it is that fills our souls with a joyful message. More than anything else right now, this is what we need to hear: our God comes to bless our lives with his gift of salvation, *"Every valley shall be exalted, every mountain and hill shall be made low, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain."*

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel