

**Dec. 11, 2020**

**Friday of the second week of Advent**

By Judith Coyle IHM

Today's Gospel suggests to me a failure to hear the music. We played the flute but you did not dance. We sang the dirge but you did not mourn.

Psalm 137 says that in the time of the Babylonian exile, the Israelites "hung their harps upon the willows by the rivers." There would be no music, no song in their exile, lest their singing evoke the memories of their lost homeland.

But Jesus also chastises the crowds for their failure to hear the "music" of John the Baptist; his extreme lifestyle of penance and fasting in the wilderness could cause him to be dismissed as demonic. And the "feasting of the son of man" provided a ready excuse to judge his words as the ramblings of a glutton or drunkard. The call of both John and Jesus to repentance could therefore easily be ignored.

In this time of our exile, for the pandemic could certainly be compared to an exile, we are literally told not to sing, as doing so might infect others. In South Africa, limited numbers may go to Mass, but you may not sing. We have had to "hang up our harps"—and our keyboards and guitars—but in doing so, perhaps we have been given time and space and quiet to listen anew for the music that echoes constantly within our own hearts.

And we have had to attune ourselves to those prophetic voices and movements that have been calling us to repentance for the many injustices of our era toward one another and to Earth itself [ Greta Thunberg, Black Lives Matter, Pope Francis ... ].

These, too, can just as easily be dismissed, unless we are prepared to "listen" and heed even the difficult voices so that we might come to be vindicated by our works.

The first reading from the Prophet Isaiah assures us that if we hearken to the voice of the Lord, we will be taught what is good and led on the way we should go. Two weeks from today, it will be Christmas. Our carols and songs this year will be modified, as will our feasting.

But the longings of our hearts, shaped perhaps by this very pandemic, may be heightened as never before by our need of salvation and for the coming of the One who alone can restore our hope and give us reason to sing—perhaps a new song, in a new key, whose melody, if we listen closely enough, may be revealed to us by a midnight chorus of angels.

Let us listen then, in these last two weeks, for the voice and for the song, so that our wearied hearts might ponder once again, with Mary of the Magnificat, what it is that has come to pass in our midst.