

A year ago, who would ever have thought that we would now be looking at seating restrictions at Mass, restaurants with limited capacity or just closed, people wearing face masks, social-distancing (we didn't even know that term before), and much more. But we have been living with these things for 10 months already. More than that, there are the isolations, hospitalizations and deaths. All this due to an infection called Covid19. We are worn out with it.

During these same months we have experienced a most disturbing and divisive political season. Now there is a glimmer of hope that the country will emerge from the election mayhem and move on. But it will be a slow process, and there are remain those who don't want political stability and sanity to prevail.

Most people are tired of all this. The prospect of light at the end of this pandemic and political tunnel brings them hope.

Two thousand years ago a people in Israel were also worn out with loss and oppression. They didn't have control of their own land – foreigners had taken over. Before that, insurrections, defeats and foreign captivity had overwhelmed them. They were tired of it all and they looked forward to a time of stability and sanity for themselves and their country.

The scripture readings for this Fourth Sunday in Advent bring God's answer to the longings of the people of Israel. They also bring hope to us in our yearning for better times.

God made it clear that the way forward was not through political will, power or conquest. God would be present within the people and the people would bring God's presence into their lives. Then things would change. Not overnight. Not with trumpet blast. Slowly, from within. When the people change, the world would change.

The decisive change came about with a young woman. God sought her cooperation in the plan that would bring the change from within that would transform the course of the world. Would she consent to being the mother of the central figure of all time? Would she consent to bringing a child into the world to change the world – no matter what would happen to him or to her? That's asking a lot – and “flying blind” as you go.

That young woman said “Yes.” Nothing has been the same since. People, however, find it difficult to accept the transformation and bring it to birth in their own lives. So, 20 centuries later we are still struggling and fighting and lying, though we do now have the template for a better existence.

For the change that we long for to take hold; for the wars and injustices and lying to one another to stop; we need only follow the path of that young woman. We need to acknowledge our weakness, accept God's invitation and allow the Spirit of God to come upon us. Then, at least in our small corner of this world better times will dawn and the progress of human life into the reign of God's love will take one more step forward.