

Comfort at Christmas
(Rev. Robert Heffernan)

"It is the Spirit who comforts us in our distress, who becomes our companion in loneliness and grief." Charles R Swindoll

Sing along because you know it well, "It's the most wonderful time of the year; they'll be much mistletoeing; and hearts will be glowing; when loved ones are near; Its the most wonderful time; it's the most wonderful time of the year."

This line is taken from, "It's the most wonderful time of the year", written by Edward Pola. and George Wile in 1963. While lots of people love this time of year, particularly retailers, not everyone feels so fondly of it. Unfortunately for many people, the Christmas season is not wonderful, nor are loved ones near. For a lot of folks, perhaps even yourself, this time of year brings back feelings of loss, grief, and pain because loved ones have passed on or a devastating event took place during a Christmas season.

In the Western Christian tradition, we have something called "Blue Christmas" that some churches practice at the end of the Advent season. It is a service that seeks to bring comfort and hope to those who have lost loved ones during the past year. Because within the true meaning and origin of Christmas, in our Judeo Christian heritage, the message of Christmas is intended to help us in the midst of tragedies when everything is not so wonderful.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our troubles" (2Cor. 1:3 – 4). Let these words soak in; the God of all comfort, through the life of Jesus Christ, that began in a humble manger, wants to comfort you in all your troubles.

The English word comfort has lost much of its meaning today. Comfort here doesn't mean being comfy. The New Testament word is Paraklesis-meaning, "the renewal of strength through encouragement." Feeling weak? Lean on God! The God of all comfort wants to renew your strength in the midst of your troubles so that you will have encouragement to face tomorrow. So that like Paul you can praise God for his endless supply of reinforcement to keep you going even in the midst of great distress

Before leaving his grief-stricken disciples, Jesus told them that he would send them "another Comforter," who would be like himself and would never leave them. This is a reference to God the Holy Spirit. Let us meditate on that wonderful truth. God is your eternal comforter and counsellor, the "One called to one's side to help," through anything, even at Christmas... especially at Christmas.

Christ came on that first Christmas to show us that God is not remote or indifferent to our needs here on earth. Therefore, you can commit your life and open your heart to the One who knows, loves and cares for you and allow him to bring you both comfort and hope this Christmas.