

Homily based on the readings from December 9, 2025 (Isaiah 40.1-11;  
Matthew 18.12-14)

As much as modern men and women would like to believe that we are capable of coming up with new ideas, that is rarely the case – particularly when it comes to philosophy or theology. Almost every meaningful insight has already been made – somewhere, sometime, by somebody – and almost every error has already been committed. As the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, “there is nothing new under the sun.” This phenomenon is particularly apparent when it comes to the countless interpretations – and especially misinterpretations – of Holy Scripture.

There is a modern misconception, which I am sure all of us have heard, that the so-called “God of the Old Testament” behaves in a substantially different way from the “God of the New Testament.” The Old Testament God, so the argument goes, is wrathful, judgmental, and vindictive – while the New Testament God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. We all know, of course, that this dichotomy is utter nonsense.

This position is basically just a recapitulation of an ancient heresy known as Marcionism – named after Marcion of Sinope, a writer from the second century, who actually taught that the God of the Hebrew Bible was a completely *separate* being from the Father of Jesus Christ. For a time, this movement was immensely popular – and had to be actively refuted by the early Church fathers. In fact, at least two phrases from the Nicene Creed were composed as a direct rebuttal to Marcionism: the statement that we believe in “one God” who is the “maker of heaven and earth” and the assertion that the Holy Spirit “has spoken through the prophets.”

In any case, the easiest way to recognize the falsehood of Marcionism – and any of its modern descendants – is simply to examine the plain text of the Old and New Testaments. The readings we heard today provide a perfect example. Even though the passage from Isaiah was written about six hundred years before the Gospel of Matthew, both books are making essentially the same point. Isaiah describes the Lord as “a shepherd feed[ing] his flock,” who “gathers the lambs” in his arms,

“[c]arrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.”

Matthew’s Gospel uses remarkably similar language, describing our heavenly Father as a shepherd searching for his lost sheep. There are some differences in tone and language between the two Testaments, but there is also a thematic unity that simply cannot be ignored.

The point, of course, is that our first reading completely undermines the notion that the “God of the Old Testament” is vengeful and angry. In fact, everything we need to know is summarized by the opening sentence: “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” From an historical perspective, the middle third of the Book of Isaiah – from Chapter 40 to Chapter 55 – was written specifically to console the Children of Israel during their traumatic experience as exiles in Babylon. In fact, some scholars even refer to these chapters as “The Book of Consolation.”

In the end, any honest observer can see that the Lord – in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in our own day and age – wants

nothing more than to care for his children who are in pain. Regardless of the misstatements that have accumulated over the centuries, God has never been anything other than what he is now and what he always will be: a *generous, devoted, and loving* Father.