

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 23, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: MI 5:1-4A

Thus says the LORD:

You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel.

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 80: 2-3, 15,16, 18-19

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken, from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.

Rouse your power, and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right hand, with the son of man whom you yourself made strong. Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Second Reading: HEB 10:5-10

Brothers and sisters:

When Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; in holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"

First he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in." These are offered according to the law. Then he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first to establish the second. By this "will," we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Gospel: LK 1:39-45

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Since this Fourth Sunday of Advent falls close to Christmas, quite naturally our minds and energies may be focused on the upcoming Christmas celebrations, family gatherings, and traditional remembrances. We will need to be watchful and observant this week and during Mass to not let our minds wander from the wonder of the miraculous to the minutia of the mundane.

The Incarnation of Christ is so filled with the miraculous that it is difficult for us as we meditate on one aspect of it to not be immediately awed by some corresponding wonder. Certainly we are dazzled by the immediate, profound, and joyful surrender of Mary, the humble handmaiden of God. Her simple trust and willingness to say yes to God's will in the face of the societal consequences which faced an unwed mother, should astound any reasonable observer. "But Mary" as Pope Paul VI observed, "is above all the example of that worship that consists in making one's life an offering to God. This is an ancient and ever new doctrine that each individual can hear again by heeding ... the very voice of the Virgin as she, anticipating in herself the wonderful petition of the Lord's Prayer—'Your will be done'—replied to God's messenger: 'I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me' And Mary's 'yes' is for all Christians a lesson and example of obedience to the will of the Father." 1

Yet even as we contemplate the wonder of Mary's response our thoughts are eclipsed and dazzled more intensely by the humble submission of the Son to the Father. He who participated as co-creator of the universe and who was perfectly united with the Father, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, willingly surrendered all rights, and humbly embraced a body prepared for him. Though he knew that his body was to be a living sacrifice that once for all would remove the effects of sin and death, yet he in willing cooperation says, "I have come to do Thy will." We stand awed to consider that the Almighty Lord would visit earth in the form of a helpless, totally defenseless and dependent, babe. We are astounded that the Ruler of the Universe would submit to the constraints of so flawed a society of man. We are amazed that he whose appearance is described as "the hair of his head was as white as wool or as snow, and his eyes like a fiery flame, his feet were like polished brass refined in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of rushing water," (Rev. 1:15) would encapsulate his glory in human flesh so that we might know him and know of his love for us. Amazing grace!!

The wonder of Jesus' incarnation is explained by Romano Guardini in the book *The Lord*: "At first a child like any other, it cries, is hungry, sleeps, and yet is 'the Word...become flesh.' It cannot be said that God 'inhabits' this infant, however gloriously; or that heaven has set its seal upon him, so that we must pursue it, suffer for it in a manner sublimely excelling all other contacts between God and man; this child is God in essence and in being ... The young creature in the stall of Bethlehem was a human being with human brain and limbs and heart and soul. And it was God. Its life was to manifest the will of the Father: to proclaim the sacred tidings, to stir mankind with the power of God, to establish the covenant, and shoulder the sin of the world ... and the victory of the Resurrection into the new existence of grace." 2

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It is no wonder that the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumped for joy, or that Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, and tapping into the wisdom of God, should proclaim "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" As we kneel in adoration and expectation on this Fourth Sunday of Advent may God grant us similar insight, allowing our hearts to also "jump with joy."

1 For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to The Blessed Virgin Mary (Marialis Cultus), an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, Section 21.

2 The Lord, by Romano Guardini, Chapter III, page 18

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading — Micah 5:1-4

1. What insight does this prophesy of Jesus' birth give you regarding our relationship with him?

Second Reading — Hebrews 10:5-10

2. How does this passage help re-define God's expectation for Israel and for us?

Gospel Reading — Luke 1:39-45

3. What are the reasons for which Elizabeth proclaims Mary blessed?
4. How important in your life is Mary's example of submission and trust? Where do you feel a similar call to surrender?
5. What can we do to restore the wonder and awe of Jesus' incarnation?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.