

Homily; 4th Sunday of Advent; Cycle B

Since Labor Day, we have been told daily how many shopping days remain until Christmas. Over the past few weeks, advertisers & retailers have been telling us how we should spend our time and money so that we and those we love may all experience the joy of Christmas. But, today...all four (4) candles on the Advent wreath are lit. The Advent Season, that time we joyfully prepare for the coming of Our Lord is about to conclude. Let's take a moment and review what our Church asks of us as the coming of Our Lord draws near.

On the 1st Sunday of Advent, we look ahead to Our Lord's second coming and were reminded to "***Be watchful ... Be alert!***" (Mark 12:33) for we know not the time.

The following week both the Prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist proclaimed "***Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.***" (Isaiah 40:3 & Mark 1:3) The path Isaiah referred to was the path by which God would bring ***His Chosen People*** out of exile to the Promised Land; the path John the Baptist refers to is our path, the path we walk so we too, may enter the Promised Land.

Last week the ***ability*** and the ***humility*** of John the Baptist were evident as we encountered John's life of preaching, prayer and simplicity. ***None of which*** he used for his own benefit. It was for our salvation that he encourages us to make straight the path.

John's humility was legendary: Our Lord said, "***...no man born of woman is greater than John,***" (Matthew 11:11)...and John, when speaking of Our Lord says, "***I am unworthy to untie His sandal strap.***" (John 1:27) So, through the middle weeks of Advent, ***it is John*** who shows what we must do to prepare...***use*** our God given talents, and once we have given of ourselves, realize, ***as he did***, anything ***we have to give***, can never compare to what Our Lord has already given.

On this last Sunday of Advent we continue the movement away from John the Baptist, and look forward to the coming of Our Lord. Look at the comparisons we find in the 1st chapter of St. Luke's Gospel; ***John*** will be ***great***; ***Jesus*** will be ***great and*** the ***Son of the Most High***. ***John*** will ***prepare*** a people; but ***Jesus*** will ***rule*** a people. ***John's*** role is ***temporary***; ***Jesus'*** kingdom ***will never end***. ***John*** is a ***prophet***; ***Jesus*** is the ***Son of God***. (Throughout Luke 1: 1 – 80)

Homily; 4th Sunday of Advent; Cycle B

This backdrop brings us to today's encounter between the Angel Gabriel and our Blessed Mother where we witness both the Annunciation *and* the Visitation, which happen to be the first two (2) Joyful Mysteries of our Rosary. Apart from Jesus, Mary's role in our salvation is the most significant, for within her womb, she conceived the *Word who became Flesh and dwelt among us.* (John 1:14)

Like John the Baptist, Mary is not boastful of her central role in salvation history! When God asks her to change every plan she has ever made, in humility she replies, "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to thy word.*" (Luke 1:38) She then rushes to the aid of Elizabeth, six-months pregnant with John. Mary is the *humble servant* in God's plan of salvation. Like John, she is not concerned about herself. Mary lacked anything that resembled societal status... she was young in a world that honors age; a woman in a world ruled by men; poor in a country that admires wealth; she had neither husband nor child; yet, she '*found favor with God.*' (Luke 1:30)

Theologians refer to Mary as the New Eve. Eve sought happiness by disobeying God, through which she brought suffering into the world. Mary sought happiness by obeying the will of God, through which she brought Our Savior into the world.

Mary's "Yes" we heard in today's Gospel, is the beginning of the mystery of God made man...*the Incarnation*...the first event in the two (2) step process of our redemption, which begins with Mary's response to the Angel, "*May it be done to me according to your word!*" (Luke 1:38) and becomes something better than we could have ever hoped for.

The second step in our redemption is Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. These two events are *the* inseparable bookends of God's divine plan. The Incarnation and the Resurrection are forever joined as we heard today in the Collect and regularly hear when we pray the Angelus. "*...that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection...*" (The Angelus)

Homily; 4th Sunday of Advent; Cycle B

Our Holy Father Emeritus, Benedict XVI gave this reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary. He said that when Christ was born, every creature offered a sign of gratitude: the angels, a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Magi, brought gifts; the shepherds, gave their admiration; the earth, provided a cave...But, our Holy Father asked, what about the human race? What do *we* have to offer God? He answered: What we have to offer...is the Virgin Mary herself. ***She shows what humanity can achieve. You and I suffer*** from an inner division called original sin - and we have ***many personal failings***. But when we look at the ***Virgin Mother***, we recognize the ***true capacity*** of our human nature. (Holy Father Benedict XVI Homily entitled, "The Greatest Boast of Our Race")

Advent, this joyful season of preparation, when done well, organizes our hearts, minds and souls in such a way that ***we are prepared*** to encounter the great Mystery of the Incarnation, where we celebrate not merely one more anniversary of Jesus' Birth; but we celebrate the mystery that continues to mark human history. Christ's birth not only commemorates the date which we use to divide time, but it is the day we celebrate God humbling Himself so that He could dwell among us...and ***HUMILITY*** is the common thread that ties together all four (4) weeks of Advent! John the Baptist had it! Our Blessed Mother had it! Our Lord has it!

Let us pray that we too may constantly practice the virtue of humility. Then, as we make those difficult decisions that determine how we to live our lives, and in those quiet moments, hear the voice of an angel speaking deep within our hearts, we will respond, ***"May it be done to me according to your word!"*** (Luke 1:38)