

# 4th Sunday of Advent

## **Introduction**

Thanks for the privilege of being with you this morning, especially on this 4th Sunday of Advent, so near to Christmas. With you I pray that the coming feast of Christmas will bring us joy, the deep and lasting joy that Jesus gives us. And let me take a moment also to thank you for your enduring faith, for your generosity, and for your witness to the Lord's love. I especially want to thank Fr. Pascal for his wonderful service as your pastor. At the same time, I want to thank all who are involved in bringing the spirit of Christmas joy to this neighborhood, especially by the distribution of food and gifts and by singing Christmas Carols.

## **Promises, Promises**

A few nights ago, the Mayor hosted a gathering of religious leaders to pray for an end to violence in the City of Baltimore. The Mayor attended along with the Police Commissioner Batts and perhaps seventy or so people turned out on a very chilly evening. Everyone expressed distress over the high level of violence in our city and about the unrest that we see in many parts of our country. Such violence leaves many families in grief and tears apart our community. And, as if we needed a further reminder, all of us are aware of the two policemen who, yesterday, were gunned down in Brooklyn. This morning, as we prepare to greet the Prince of Peace at Christmas, let us pray earnestly for an end to violence and a restoration of peace.

Many people, of course, talk about peace and make many promises. But don't we sometimes find it hard to make and keep promises - promises that we will live the Gospel, be true to our vocation, and work to make our community a better place? And we sometimes find it hard to believe the promises other people make, when they say they are working to make things better. One of the reasons why there is so much violence is because we no longer believe one another. Without trust, there is no peace.

## **Be It Done to Me**

In the Gospel, we see something different going on. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that God chose her to be the Mother of her Son. The angel astonishes Mary when he promises her that she would conceive this child by the

power of the Holy Spirit and that he would come to save the people from their sins.

There is a lot the angel did not tell Mary. He did not tell Mary that her Son would be born on a cold night in a crude stable; or that her heart would be pierced with sword of sorrow as she saw him rejected by the people and put to death, indeed hung on a cross like a common criminal. Mary must have had a thousand questions, so much must have raced through her mind while the angel awaited her answer.

Mary did not respond with a list of questions, conditions, or demands. She didn't ask to consult a lawyer, a friend, or even a spiritual director. Instead, she replied to the angel with "the obedience of faith". Because she was without sin, both her faith was pure and her obedience was complete. Without anything to hold her back, she said in total freedom: "Let it be done to me according to your word". When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, advanced in years and bearing in her womb John the Baptist, Elizabeth said of her: "Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."

## **Our Situation**

When we pray the Our Father, we say something similar: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". But our faith is sometimes compromised and our obedience faltering. What really does St. Paul mean when he tells us we should respond to God's saving plan and our role in it with "the obedience of faith?"

Well, we are mostly practical people, so the first question that pops into our minds is, 'What does God want me to do?' In that we are bit like David in our first reading. who thought he would please God by building him a house, a temple. But the Lord had other plans for David. The Lord wanted something other than a temple of wood and stone from David, and of us.

In the first instance, faith is not a "to do" list, nor is it simply a list of things that must be believed. The heart of faith is trust. Mary said "yes" to the angel and to God because she trusted him. She believed the promise of his love would never fail. She believed in his love for her. She trusted that he guides the course of history in ways that exceed our understanding. So she said, "Be it done to me."

Once we've fallen in love with God, once we've put our trust in his love, everything

changes. Then it is not so difficult for us to believe what the Church teaches. Then it is not so difficult for us to believe in the power of his mercy over our sins. Then it is not so difficult for us to do whatever the Lord asks of us, including the hard work of building up trust in our community – trust in our families, trust in our churches, and trust in the relationship between people and civic officials. This is how we respond to God’s love with “the obedience of faith”.

Jesus, I Trust in Thee In a few days, we’ll look once again at the image of the newborn Savior, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. As we look upon Jesus, born to set us free from our sins, born to open our hearts to God’s redeeming mercy, born to help us recover our squandered dignity, may we have the grace to say: “Jesus I trust in Thee!” “Be it done to me, just as you say!”

May God bless us and keep us always in His love.