

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year B – 12/24/17

My dear people of God: I wish to start our reflection for today with the second reading. In his letter to the Romans, chapter 16, verses 25 to 27, Paul says:

“To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen”.

The second reading apparently seems to be out of place because it does not talk about Advent Preparation nor about the Second Coming of the Savior. However, upon reading the sacred text more religiously, we will discover that it is actually a source of joy for us Christians, realizing that GOD is our enabler. The Greek word for this is “dunamai”. It denotes power or the ability to do. *{As an aside, it is not surprising to know what dynamite can do}.*

The gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ which Paul preaches is Jesus Christ Himself. When Paul says, “my Good News,” he is speaking of the reality of the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. In another letter, in his letter to the Galatians, he said that the Gospel he preached was not according to man, but a direct revelation from Christ Himself . . . *“for neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galatians 1:11-12). The kerygma (meaning proclamation), was about the following:

(1) The fulfillment of scripture; (2) The inauguration of a new age; (3) The lineage of Jesus, traceable back to King David; (4) Jesus’ death on a cross; (5) Jesus’ burial; (6) Jesus’ resurrection; (7) Jesus’ exaltation; and, (8) The promise that Jesus will come again to judge and to save.

Paul’s point in this verse is that the Gospel (the Good News of Christ) and the salvation that Jesus brings, which was mysteriously hidden for ages, is that which strengthens the Christian; that which makes it possible for the Christian to be steadfast.

God made a covenant with Abraham, but Abraham never learned of the role that Christ would play in fulfilling that covenant. The same was true of Moses and other great men and women of the Jewish faith.

But God left clues aplenty so that, when the plan was fully revealed, the Jewish people could find those clues and relate them to Christ's work. For instance, when God made a covenant with Abram, he promised, "*All the families of the earth will be blessed in you*" (Genesis 12:3).

But it wasn't until the death and resurrection of Christ that God pulled back the curtain to reveal that which had been hidden for so long - that Christ not only conquered death for Himself, but also for all who have faith in Him. We have sinned, which estranged us from God—but Christ, through His death and resurrection, has reconciled us to God once again (Romans 5:10-11). Just as Adam's sin led to our condemnation, so also Christ's righteousness makes possible our justification (Romans 5:18).

The WORD of God is more than a word—it includes the POWER to accomplish what God has ordered. God has ordered that the mystery be revealed—that that which was hidden for so long be made manifest—and it happened according to the order or the commandment of God.

The purpose of this revelation is to bring all nations to the "*obedience of faith.*" The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people to the exclusion of all other peoples. However, there were earlier hints that God's intent might be otherwise. God promised Abram, "All the families of the earth will be blessed in you" (Genesis 12:3). God sent Jonah to save the Ninevites -Gentiles, much against Jonah's will.

Paul's letter to the Romans concludes that everything will redound to the honor and glory of the only wise God, through Jesus Christ. That means the ultimate purpose of Paul proclamation is to give glory to God. But the most powerful way to give God glory is by the living of a Christ-like life.

Let me go to the First Reading. The first reading is about King David who is the most famous of the Kings of Israel. We remember how his predecessor King Saul lost favor in the eyes of God and we recall how the Prophet Samuel then chose David, the youngest among Jesse's sons, and anointed him as Saul's successor. From that moment David grew from being an *insignificant shepherd*

boy to *a man of great stature*. We recall how he killed the giant, Goliath, by hitting him on the forehead with a stone from his sling.

As we heard in our first reading David had a great desire to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem; but the Prophet Nathan tells him that he is not to build a house for God to dwell in, but instead God would build a house for him. By this he means that he would grant David a great family of descendants; we call this the House of David.

We Christians have always considered ourselves to be part of David's house and line, not through direct biological lineage like the Jews *but through a deep spiritual lineage*. It remains very important that Jesus Himself can directly trace His ancestors back to King David because it was firmly believed that the Messiah was to be a Son of David.

Since we are the spiritual descendants of Jesus we regard ourselves as being spiritual descendants of King David too. According to the Jewish people the coming Messiah would incorporate many of the best characteristics of King David and his rule would unite the People of Israel and inaugurate a time of universal peace and brotherhood. Of course, we now see how the Kingdom of God as inaugurated by Jesus Christ goes far beyond anything the Jewish people could ever have conceived. Christ's is no purely earthly Kingdom but is rather one which unites heaven and earth as well as past, present and future. Ultimately the Kingdom of God is all the people of the earth from all the ages gathered in worship around God's throne.

Now, to the gospel: In the Gospel reading we are told the story of the Annunciation as given to us by Luke the Evangelist. We hear the story of how the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to be the mother of the Son of God. We hear too how Mary agrees to this divine proposal in her most beautiful words, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.'

The Church places these two readings from scripture before us today because there is a very strong link between them. It is understandable that David wants to build a temple for the Lord but he is told that this is not to be his task. It is a role eventually given to his son Solomon who constructs a fabulous temple in Jerusalem, but his Temple only lasts about four hundred years and was in fact completely demolished by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon.

A second temple was built after the Jewish people returned from exile in Babylon, but this in turn was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD and was never rebuilt. The lesson we have to draw from these events is that these earthly temples, while being important places of worship in their day, were essentially material constructions.

What we realize is that God cannot be housed in a world of His own creation. As an entirely spiritual entity God cannot be contained within four walls. God exists completely outside time and space; it is HE who gives shelter to the world and not the world which gives shelter to God.

This brings us to Mary and to the account of her Annunciation. After many generations it is she who eventually gives a home to the SON of GOD in her womb. This is a role for which she is specially chosen and prepared by God. It is she who becomes the real temple, the true dwelling place of God's only Son.

As we have seen God exists entirely outside the material world and yet HE chooses to enter the world and occupy the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary in order to achieve His purposes, namely our salvation.

Mary is prepared for this unique task through her Immaculate Conception so that she could be free from sin and worthy enough to carry Christ in her womb. Moreover, the special graces given to her enabled her to be preserved from sin throughout her life. We too become sharers in this great mystery because God sends His Spirit into our hearts and so lives within us. This is one of the ongoing results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred on the first Pentecost Day. As we were taught as children, this makes us Temples of the Holy Spirit.

This wonderful gift helps us each one of us to live grace-filled lives and to be faithful to the message of Jesus Christ, our Lord. We see now how the two readings link up. We see why David was commanded not to build a temple; we see how Mary herself became the true temple and indeed we see too how we ourselves share in this great gift to the world. This is the last Sunday before Christmas and this year seems to flow into Christmas. It is a day on which we reflect on the great span of history involved in preparing for Christ's coming into our world. It is a day on which we come to a greater realization of Mary's particular role in God's plan for the salvation of the world. It is a day which reminds us how deeply we too are involved in in this plan and how intimately we are connected to Christ and to his Mother Mary.

May we all have a Christ-centered Christmas. Amen !