

Fourth Sunday of Advent B/2011

All the readings of this last Sunday of Advent bring us to the heart of the mystery of the incarnation that we will be celebrating at Christmas. At the heart of this mystery is God's plan to save all the people in his son, Jesus, but revealed when the time was fulfilled.

The first reading of the book of Samuel describes the project of King David to build a temple for God. However, instead of David building a house for God, God revealed to the prophet Nathan that it was Him who will establish a house for David. He will put one of his descendants on his throne. His house and his kingdom will last forever and his throne will stand firm forever.

What is behind this text is the idea that our God is a God of surprise. He will never cease to surprise us, even at the heart of our own projects of life. In fact, while David was thinking of a material house to build for God, God surprised him by promising to erect for him a strong dynasty. While for David and Nathan God's promise had a political meaning in the sense of the consolidation of David's kingdom, God gave to the promise a spiritual scope by sending Jesus, offspring of David, as a savior of the world.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as Mary is surprised by the Angel Gabriel with God's plan to make her the mother of Jesus. First of all, the Gospel starts with the description of the status of Mary as fiancée to Joseph and the mission of the Angel Gabriel. Then, it relates the conversation between Mary and the Angel Gabriel in which Mary expresses her trouble with regard to God's plan and the angel reassures her that through the work of the Holy Spirit everything will be fine.

In the end, the Angel Gabriel describes to Mary how God's plan will be fulfilled in her and gives her instruction on what she has to do about it. The angel also encourages her to trust God by referring to a miracle God has done with her cousin, Elizabeth.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the mystery of God's plan. Like in the first reading where David wanted to build a house for God and God acted otherwise, Joseph and Mary had a plan of marriage. But God surprised both of them by giving them to carry out another plan, different from theirs.

What it means concretely is that we cannot dictate to God what is good for us and how it has to be carried out. We are very often disappointed when our plans do not succeed or our dreams are broken. Sometime we are unhappy when we do not receive what we want in our prayers. We should, however, remember that God has his own plan for us. He has his time and his ways of fulfilling them. What he wants is just that we trust him and put our lives into his hands.

With regard to this episode, Advent is, then, an invitation to us so that we learn anew, like Mary, how to trust God and to be obedient to his plan in our lives.

The second thing we learn is about human participation in God's plan. In fact, God would have saved the world otherwise, without human intervention. And yet, he chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus. By doing so, God lets human beings participate in his plan of salvation. As God did in the past by choosing the prophets to act on his behalf for the good of his people, so has he chosen Mary to be the mother of his Son, Jesus..

In that sense, Advent reminds us of our role as God's instruments and mediators for the salvation of our fellows. For that reason, we have to keep ourselves good and to strive for holiness, knowing well that God can use us to reach out to many.

The third thing we learn is about Mary as our model of faith. This last Sunday of Advent, as a matter of fact, Mary comes to us in her simplicity and innocence as a model of faith. When the angel addressed her, she was perplexed because she did not understand everything, and yet she trusted God. When she accepted God's plan to become the mother of his son, she put herself in a very difficult position, because she was already the fiancée of Joseph. And yet, she put her future into God's hands.

In a similar way, there are many things happening in our lives we do not understand very well. Perhaps, the illness of our child, the sickness of our spouse or the death of our beloved ones has left us wondering whether God is with us or not. Perhaps, the difficult financial situation in which we find ourselves has worsened to the point that we do not know what to do in order to envision an outcome. And yet, it is in these very difficult situations we have to put our faith at work. Mary teaches us that we have to trust God in all the circumstances of life, as difficult as they might be.

By saying "yes" to God, Mary has opened the door to the incarnation of Jesus and allowed God to become one of us. Without this reminder there would be a thousand ways of celebrating Christmas, but Mary shows us the right one. Mary shows us that openness of heart to God, obedience and trust in God, are virtues we need to develop in this time of Advent as we prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Plus, by obeying God's plan in spite of all the human obstacles, Mary teaches us the sense of true generosity and unselfish love, especially in this Holiday season. In fact, it is impossible to fulfill any ministry in the Church, in the spirit of Jesus and for his people, when we are selfish and locked in ourselves. It is only when we accept to be generous and available with our lives that we can dedicate our lives to the service of God and to his Church.

In a similar way, God calls us like Mary to serve him by serving our fellows. The mission he wants to give us will not always be easy, but we can count on him. Perhaps because of our human imperfections, we might be afraid about it. But still, we have to trust God, knowing that when we do our best according to our skills and our abilities, he will take care of the rest.

May he help us prepare the coming of his son with a purified heart! May he help us build ourselves into a house of his presence so that we might be worthy of welcoming his son when he comes again. Let us ask the Blessed Mother to intercede for us so that we imitate her faith and her generosity. God bless you all!

2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16: 25-27; Luke 1: 26-38



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