

Cycle C 4th Sunday of Advent

Reading 1, 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

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.

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.

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.

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

Reading II, 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."

The readings on this 4th Sunday of Advent, especially the Gospel visitation story of Elizabeth and Mary, switch our focus to the birth of Jesus and teach us something about Hope and God's way of working. God prefers to make Himself present and work through ordinary people who lack importance or status according to worldly standards. God loves us so much that He sent His son to be our Savior and to show us how important it is to be born into humble surroundings. If we want to be sensitive to God's presence and open to His purposes, we have to rid ourselves of any desire to be superior or to look down on other people. Blessed are the people who serve day-to-day with simplicity and a lack of worldly sophistication. If we don't learn and live that kind of simplicity, we'll miss the vital message that God is always trying to communicate to us...."*I love all of My Creation!*"

A few years ago friends of mine Mark and Susan were out walking at 6:00AM. They had a rough week...their daughter had just filed for divorce and the whole family was in turmoil. It was garbage day, so they didn't think much about seeing the garbage truck coming down the street....but when the driver stopped his truck as he got near them, hopped out and approached them, they wondered what was wrong. Imagine their surprise when the garbage man said to them, "would you pray with me?" It was stunning, Mark said...it lifted them up...it made their day, and if that wasn't a message from God, then he had no idea what had just happened. That experience is what I am talking about....it was an every-day God-filled opportunity that make our ordinary lives extraordinary!

In the first reading, we see how God chose Bethlehem, "*too small to be among the clans of Judah*" as the prophet Micah puts it. So it was not unusual for God to turn to such a community as the place from which the Savior would emerge. It was God's constant practice to chose the weak, as St Paul says, making them strong for carrying out His purpose.

In the Gospel we hear about Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, who had been unable to have children and had become resigned to the fact that she would never have any. Among the Jews at that time this was a matter of great regret and even some shame. Whatever the real

cause was it was always considered to be the woman's fault. So in her own community Elizabeth's status was inferior and unworthy. And, it would have been a source of pain and embarrassment for her and her husband Zacharia as well. But God thinks differently and many times when He has something to communicate, He picks people who are lacking in prominence. So He chose Elizabeth as the person He wanted for a special task: to give life to John the Baptist, the herald who would announce the coming of the Christ.

When we turn to Mary we find someone who didn't have any reluctance in responding to God's call. But she was a young peasant girl from a drab town, Nazareth, what could she do? Like the other people God preferred to choose, she didn't have any great status. But, she was blessed with God's grace and filled with uncomplicated faith and devotion...and the Hope that one day the Christ would appear to reconcile his people with God.

So maybe the readings this Sunday, and especially the gospel figures of Elizabeth and Mary, will prepare us for this Christmas and the New Year 2026 by teaching us something about Hope and God's way of working. Maybe we will now be ready to recognize those God-filled opportunities where God prefers to make Himself present and work through us ordinary people who lack importance or status according to worldly standards.

But above all we shouldn't over think our every-day God-filled opportunities...listen for the vital message that God is always trying to communicate to us: *"I love all of My Creation!"* Watch for the God-filled opportunities to be "The Body of Christ" sharing God's Love! We're in this TOGETHER!

And the Church says, AMEN!