

Cycle A Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 IS 7:10-14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky! But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!"

Then Isaiah said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary people, must you also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.

Responsorial Psalm PS 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

R. (7c and 10b) Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD? or who may stand in his holy place? One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, a reward from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

Reading 2 ROM 1:1-7

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel MT 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

*“...he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.”*

Several years ago I was speaking with a friend about our grandchildren. He mentioned something about he felt the kids really weren't his grandchildren because his boy was adopted. Well I was more than a little shocked knowing what a great father he was. I asked him, "What would have happened if Joseph had not accepted Jesus as his son?" He said, "You know Roger, you are right." From that day, he had a new attitude and outlook on his son...and his grandchildren. You know sometimes the Holy Spirit really prompts us to say the right thing at the right time.

We don't talk much about Joseph, but whenever I hear these scriptures, I wonder what he must have been thinking when the angel told him about how Mary became pregnant in literal and realistic terms. *"...do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."* Here was this man engaged to a woman he loved who was going to bear a child that was not his own "flesh and blood." And everything was already worked out: the child will be a boy and have the name of Jesus. It's one thing to know the ancient scriptures and believe that such an event would occur. It is quite another to accept it and take joy that it is happening right now. How could it be good news for Joseph when the angel appeared and told him Isaiah's "virgin with child" was Mary? Could he be thrilled that Mary would give birth to a baby boy the Prophets called Immanuel, "God with us"? I am sure he was thinking, "Well sign me up."

St. Joseph has been my Patron Saint since I became Catholic over 50 years ago. I marvel at Joseph, our model of the unwavering husband and father, faith-filled provider, and trusting protector. While it was clear that Joseph accepted being an adoptive father, things never came easy. In fact, just about everything that could go wrong, went wrong.

Instead of security and comfort, Mary and Joseph found themselves facing a treacherous journey during the last stage of her pregnancy. I can't imagine the stress they endured when there was no suitable place to stay, and no family or friends around. We know the earliest days were full of fear and flight. And, the first ceremony in the temple would be marred by the ominous prediction of an old seer that his son would be rejected and his wife would have her very soul pierced. After the early years of migration and displacement, even when the family finally settled down, there was more trouble. His obviously well-educated and self-confident son would be misplaced in Jerusalem and, after a three-day search, Jesus showed up reminding them that he had another "Father" who made a greater claim on him.

Over the years it could not have been easy for Joseph to trust God. Yet despite all the hardship and maybe even doubt, Joseph, the adoptive father, the humble husband, the good provider, the enduring protector, he knew that God loved him and his family. He drew upon that love as an as husband and father as he sacrificed while caring for his wife and son. It took great love and great faith for Joseph to fully accept both Mary and Jesus as his family...but I also have to believe that he finally realized he was truly blessed because of who they were...He must have been awed knowing that he was chosen by God to be the husband of the Mother of God, and earthy father to the promised Savior of mankind.

And so, on this 4th Sunday of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us invite St. Joseph, trusting husband and father, to pray for us and help us in our struggles as spouses and parents and Christians, so we may never waver from our trust in God's love.

St. Joseph, pray for us. Amen.