

4th Sunday of Advent, December 24, 2017

When I was in my fifth grade we used to help fetch water for the priest as there are no running water in the Rectory. We used to sleep at the rectory in the night so we can study and do our home works in the night. One night it was raining heavily. It was late in the night. We woke up and we wanted to collect water falling from the roof. We took a bucket and kept the bucket outside where the water falls from the roof. Early next morning we went to get water from the bucket. There was not a drop of water in the bucket. Because in our slumber we kept the bucket upside down. A bucket gets filled with water only when it is turned upside. So also we are filled with graces when we are turned towards God. In today's Gospel we hear the Angel Gabriel salute Mary, "Hail full of Grace." The readings today invite us to be turned towards God and be filled with God's blessings as Mary did.

The focus of today's liturgy is the Davidic covenant, the promise of a throne that will last forever. It appears in the First reading in the Responsorial psalm, and in the Gospel, where the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that "the Lord God will give (her son) the throne of David his father." The Scripture texts describe God's promise to David and its fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of David. The First reading tells of God's promise to David that he would have a long line of royal descendants culminating in a final King, Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells us that this King would be born to an ordinary virgin through the Holy Spirit, and that the Son of God, Jesus, would become a descendant of David. The Gospel narrative tells us also by reminding us that God's promise is best fulfilled not in buildings, or even in great kings like Solomon, but rather in humble souls like Mary, who trusted in God's promise.

The Gospel stresses the key role of Mary in the work of our salvation. The angel appears to Mary and salutes her, "Hail, full of grace." Mary is described as "full of grace." Mary is filled with God's favor and graciousness, something which she has in no way earned, but which was given as a gratuitous gift by God. Mary is told by the angel Gabriel, that the

Lord is literally with her: She is the new Ark, a tent and temple. God is literally and physically in her, and thus she is the greater house of God promised to David.

The Apostles' Creed includes two very important phrases describing the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Creed declares two specific statements about God becoming human. Statement One: He ". . . was conceived by the Holy Spirit . . ." Statement Two: He was ". . . born of the Virgin Mary . . ." In Luke's Annunciation scene, we are face-to-face with one of the major doctrines of the Christian Faith – the Virgin Birth. There are two great reasons for accepting this dogma: (1) The clear literal meaning of this passage in Luke and Mt 1:18-25, is that Jesus was to be born of Mary without a human father. (2) It is natural to argue that if Jesus was a very special Person, he would have a special entry into the world, and since this conception is the work of God's direct power, Mary's virginity is unaffected. God is physical in Mary, conceived as human, her very flesh, by the power of the Most High, making Mary the temple, the house promised to David.

Jesus' earthly existence begins with Mary's "Yes" in today's account of the Annunciation. Although we normally regard the birth of Jesus as the beginning of God's presence among us, the Church teaches that the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit took place at the moment that Mary agreed to be the mother of Jesus. Mary's "Yes," changed the world. Her obedience to God's call changed the lives of all of us. How many times have we said "No," to God? How different would things be – for us and for others – if we had said "Yes," to him more often? "The Blessed Virgin Mary was the first human person who could say of Jesus, "This is my body, this is my blood." She was the first altar of the Incarnation's mystery. Her body a fitting temple, where the mystery of transubstantiation occurred first. Was she not, then, the first priest, the first minister of the sacrament of the real presence?" (Fr. Kavanaugh).

Jesus' own moment of greatness, like his Mother's, came when he said "Yes," to his Father in Gethsemane, and Jesus' own obedience is our model. Will we surrender to God and allow God to work greater things in

our lives? Will we surrender agenda and our will to God and allow God's agenda and will to become a reality for and through us? It is by saying, with Jesus and Mary, a wholehearted and totally unconditional "Yes," to God that Jesus will be re-born in us. By our saying "yes," Jesus will be born or reborn in others too.