

## Homily – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

Today is the 4th and last Sunday of Advent and this year, the day before Christmas. Today, we are standing right at the front door of Christmas and just before we enter, our liturgy presents Mary to us, to be our model. In following her example, we are called to faith & holiness, humility & simplicity, obedience & surrendering to the will of God, as we await the coming of our Saviour into the world and into our lives.

Obviously, God's choice of Mary to be the Mother of His Son was special. So was her own response, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" But God has also chosen all of us for something special. For this, like Mary, we are also favoured. What has been our response to God's choice of us? Consequently, like Mary, we are challenged to use our freedom and respond with our 'yes' to God's call.

Many years ago I spent a great deal of time with this gospel during my time of vocational discernment. It was Mary's trust in God that inspired me to do the same and say yes to the call to be a priest. Our liturgy today reveals a great mystery, namely that God does not often work out His plan according to our expectation, yet he does not work out His plan of salvation all by Himself. Rather, He invites us to cooperate in His plan of salvation. Salvation is God's business, but He has designed it to be a partnership; in which we have a role to play.

In the first reading we hear about King David's plans. He has, through the grace of God, secured his kingdom; "the Lord had given him rest from his enemies on every side." Responding to a noble inspiration of his heart, King David wants to do something to express his gratitude towards the Lord. He wants to build the Lord a house, a temple, that is worthy of God's glory. "David's intentions seek the good, but God reminds him that He does not need anything from us. The Lord reminds David that He does not dwell in a house made by human hands, but rather "I have been with you wherever you went...." God is always present among us, loving us just as we are.

So all of us too can think of times when God has disrupted our plans. There are ways in which God especially interferes with them. One is, when we are really busy and we do not want any interruptions, God often brings us into contact with someone who needs our help. In times of internal emptiness our conscience – like the angel Gabriel in today's Gospel passage – sends us a message saying that we really need to keep working, or to do a little extra work, or to be extra patient with someone, or to hold our tongue.

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As a young man, St. Augustine lived a hedonistic life, one in which sensuality and self-indulgence reigned supreme. Along the way, prior to his becoming a Christian he had a son by a woman to whom he was not married. Augustine was brilliant and renowned. By worldly standards he lived a spectacularly successful life. His mother Monica (patron of this church) had prayed for his conversion for over thirty years and eventually her prayers were answered.

All the while Augustine's heart was hungering for something. He was aware that his inner self was empty. Even though his life was filled with sensuality and pleasure, fame and popularity, he knew there was something more. He also knew that nature of the human heart was destined for a higher and greater reality than what could be found in this world. With that realization Augustine eventually became a Christian.

For us, as we make our plans for the coming year, let us remember to include God in our plan and entrust everything about us to His care and we shall find true happiness and peace.