

Homily on the 4th Sunday of Advent
St. John Paul II Parish, Cedar Springs, Michigan
Mary Queen of Apostles Parish, Sand Lake, Michigan
Father Lam T. Le, Pastor
December 23, 2018

“How does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

(Lk 1:43)

Have you noticed the familiarity of the collect/opening prayer for the Mass on this 4th Sunday of Advent?

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son
was made known by the message of an Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

If you noticed the familiarity, it is because you have prayed the *Angelus*, which commemorates the incarnation of Christ. The prayer comes from the seventh century Papal practice at Rome where it was assigned to March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, when the angel appeared unto Mary when she conceived Christ. For the 1970 Latin edition of the *Roman Missal* the prayer was transferred to the last Sunday before the birth of our Lord. This prayer preserves an early insight that the whole mystery of Christ from his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection to his continuing presence in his body, the Church is one integral mystery. The specific moments of this mystery in salvation history are mapped out over the course of the church year, but this prayer reminds us that every Sunday, every liturgy celebrates the whole mystery and our share in it.

When it comes to the *Angelus*, I will never forget one of the holy priests from the town of my birth. In 1975, when the communists had complete control over Vietnam, this priest had the courage to get on the bell-tower of the Church daily to ring the bell, to lead the prayer at the traditional times, 6AM, 12NOON, and 6PM. Despite the threat of imprisonment by the authorities, he wanted the community to commemorate with him the beginning of human salvation in the *Angelus*. Then he was arrested and 8 years were spent in solitary confinement. One cannot help but admire the courage and the faith of this holy priest. May he now rest with our Savior!

On this last Sunday of Advent, let us join what the holy priest had done despite the threat of imprisonment: to look up to Mary as a model for keeping advent. For this we recall a litany of the Blessed Virgin, in which one of the petitions is “Ark of the Covenant, pray for us!”

This petition perhaps captures an insight of the Gospel Proclamation for the 4th Sunday of Advent: Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out: “how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43). How is the new Ark of the Covenant attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the greeting of Elizabeth?

By picturing Elizabeth greeting Mary with these words, Luke is alluding to an Old Testament passage. When we recognize the illusion of Luke’s teaching, Mary is the New Ark becomes ever clearer. In 2 Samuel we read that the Ark of the Covenant --the symbol of God’s presence with God’s people -- was recaptured from the Philistines and brought back to Jerusalem. David, in awe of the Lord’s power, says: “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” (2 Sam 6: 9). By having Elizabeth echo David’s words, Luke is picturing Mary as the new ark of the covenant and Jesus as the God who has come to dwell with God’s people. That is why John the Baptist leaps in his mother’s womb for he too recognizes the presence of the Lord.

Although the story of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is primarily about Jesus’s identity, as both Elizabeth and the child recognize the presence of the Lord in Mary’s womb, the story also teaches us, the people of

God in the final hours of the Advent Season. As indicated throughout this season, Advent is preparation for the feast of our Savior's birth and ultimately for His Second Coming. In these final hours of preparation, we need to be like that of Mary, be the ark for God to dwell.

Although it is ideal to go to confession earlier during this time of grace, it is still not too late! Check the bulletin for the time of confession before the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. Every Christian heart must be the dwelling place/ark for the Lord. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20). Amen.

Scriptural Readings:

**Reading 1 MI 5:1-4A; Responsorial Psalm PS 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Reading 2 HEB 10:5-10;
Alleluia LK 1:38; Gospel LK 1:39-45**
