

Fourth Sunday of Advent - Lectionary: 12

Reading I - 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.

R. (4) **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 Holy Spirit and the Gift of Life

Micah tells us “He [Jesus Christ] shall be peace.” He doesn’t say that the Savior will bring peace, but that He *is* peace. If, because of His love for us, we remain in Him and He in us, then we can remain one, in His peace and at peace. If our hearts are not beating with the rhythm of the heart of God, then there can be no peace within us. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, our sins are forgiven and we’re at peace with God. In the Eucharist, we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and we’re united to God in that peace. And that experience brings an awareness of the great story into which all our individual stories fit. We start to see others with the eyes of Christ.

I’m sure some of us have our own stories about experiences with the Holy Spirit, but also, that too many of us have no relationship whatsoever with the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity. Yet the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation is an essential role. The Holy Spirit is central to what takes place between Mary and Elizabeth as well as the infants John and Jesus. When Mary speaks, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaps and Elizabeth is moved in and by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the truth about which John will become the great herald. Luke’s word for that leaping connotes the mountains skipping like rams and the hills, like lambs responding to Israel coming forth from Egypt. ^{Ps 114:4} Already, before his birth, John is touched with Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of God’s great plan to bring salvation and wholeness to the world.

“Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice, but John the first to experience grace; whereas the natural sound of words rang in his mother’s ears, John rejoiced in the mystery of what they meant. Elizabeth felt Mary’s presence at her side; John, the closeness of the Lord. Elizabeth heard her cousin’s greeting; John felt the presence of her Son. The two women spoke of grace, but their two sons experienced grace and communicated that gift to their mothers in such a way that, in a double miracle, both women began to prophesy, inspired by their sons.” (St Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, ad loc.) ¹

Part of the meaning of Christmas is that, by contemplating the experiences of Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Elizabeth, and John, we learn from them what it means to have faith and from that faith to say an unqualified and unconditional ‘Yes’ to God. Part of the meaning of Christmas for our reflection and growth is to contemplate the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation and to seek a deeper and stronger relationship with the Holy Spirit.

These readings on this Fourth Sunday of Advent this year, also speak to us of the dignity and value of human life from the moment of conception. The story of the encounter between Elizabeth and Mary is the story of the initial encounter of their children, as yet unborn. One of them being only a few weeks earlier having been conceived, and the other in just a few weeks before birth. It is a clear affirmation that these two are indeed human children, not a mass of cells invading the women’s bodies. The unborn baby John leaps, moved by the Holy Spirit, in recognition of the presence of the Lord, of Jesus also in the womb of his mother.

Every single child of God must by definition be pro-life. Each and every one must affirm by their words and actions that every human being is made in God’s image and likeness and therefore has dignity and value. We ought to remember this truth during these seasons of Advent and Christmas. Remember it while in traffic to visit family or Christmas shop. Remember it during the inevitable awkward or difficult moments with family members. Remember it when we are inclined to turn away from the poor!

¹ [The Navarre Bible: New Testament](#) (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2008), 245–246.