

4th Sunday of Advent - C
Micah 5:1-4a;
Hebrews 10:5-10;
Luke 1:39-46
Little Flower - 12/23/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Today's Gospel introduces us to Mary. However, the Gospel does not tell the story of the Annunciation but the story of Mary's visitation to her elderly, pregnant cousin Elizabeth.

In today's first reading, the Lord through the Prophet Micah says, "*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....*" In this prophecy, God is telling his people that the messiah is going to come from tiny Bethlehem rather than from mighty Jerusalem. This verse illustrates one of the great truths of God's revelation: God chooses the weak and makes them strong in bearing witness to Him.

This same truth is exemplified in God's choice of Mary to be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. From the perspective of the world, there was nothing extraordinary about Mary. She was not rich, powerful, or famous. She was an ordinary young woman, yet God chose her from among all women to be the mother of his only Son.

This truth has powerful implications for us. My guess is that most of us believe that God is not calling us to do anything important or great for Him during our lives. On the contrary, by our birth and even more by our baptism, God has chosen us with all of our limitations, weaknesses, and faults to do important and great things for Him. Like Mary, we have been graced by God. Our challenge is discover that to which God is calling us and then to answer the call with courage. As Richard Cardinal Cushing once wrote, "A great deal of talent is lost in the world for want of a little courage..."

In today's reading from Hebrews, Jesus said, "*As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God.*" Jesus' death was salvific for us because he fulfilled God's will for him. God's will was that he love God and us perfectly. In his death on the cross, he offered his life to God for us, joining love of God and love of us perfectly in the same act.

Mary's yes to the angel was the same. Her yes to the angel joined her love for God and her love for others in one choice. When the angel told Mary that God had chosen her to be the mother of his Son, after she asked how this could happen since she was a virgin, she accepted God's will for her, demonstrating her love for God. However, that same act was an act of love for us because it made possible Jesus' birth into our world as our savior.

As Christians, we are called to pattern our lives after Jesus and Mary. In other words, as we strive to discern God's will for us and live out our Christian lives, we want all of our choices and actions to join love for God and love for others.

Finally, the visitation offers a dramatic example of how love for others makes Christ present to them. After the Annunciation, even though she was young and newly pregnant, Mary immediately set out for Elizabeth's house to assist her during her pregnancy. In effect, she brought Jesus to Elizabeth on two levels. She brought Jesus physically since she was pregnant with Jesus. However, she also made him present through her self-giving, self-sacrificing love for Elizabeth. When we serve others, we bring Christ and Christ's love into their lives.

My brothers and sisters, today's Liturgy reminds us that God chooses the weak, i.e. us, and makes us strong in bearing witness to Him. As Christians, we are called to join love for God and love for others in all our choices and actions realizing that when we love and serve others, we make Christ present in their lives.