

12.23.2018 – Fourth Sunday in Advent – Homily

Book of Micah 5:1-4 Heb: 10:5-10 Lk: 1:39-45

We are into the final run-up to Christmas now. The fourth candle has been lit on our Advent wreath. There only remains the central white candle, which will be lit on Christmas day. The most important way for us as followers of Christ to celebrate Christmas, the feast of light, is by giving expression in our daily lives to the presence of Christ the light of the world. We are called at all times, but especially at this time of the year, to be a light in the darkness, to bring the light of the Lord's love to others.

We all have last minute preparations to do for the feast of Christmas. Some of us may still have a present or two to purchase. People often approach the arrival of Christmas day with different feelings. The children, of course, are looking forward to the coming of Santa. Many adults too will be looking forward to this special time and to what it means. Others may be less enthusiastic about the prospect of Christmas. Some may have had an experience of loss of one kind or another in recent weeks or in the past twelve months, and they sense that Christmas will stress the sense of loss. Money is not as plentiful as it was and the potential expense of Christmas can be a worry for some. Those who are prone to feeling lonely can feel more lonely over the Christmas time. It can be a difficult time for people living alone who may not get many visitors.

For that reason, paying visits can be such an important part of the Christmas time, especially visiting those who are living alone and who value a visit at this time of year more than any other time. We will all be doing some visiting over the next few days. We will travel to meet up with members of our family or else they will travel to us.

The readings today suggest that the real gift we can make to each other at Christmas time, and, indeed, at all times, is the gift of ourselves, the gift of our presence. According to our second reading this morning,

when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Here I am'. His gift to us was his presence, and it remains his ongoing gift to us. 'I will be with you always', he tells us, 'until the end of time'. We all know from experience that the presence of people can mean so much more to us than any presents they might carry with them. For parents who have children living abroad the real gift consists in their coming home, their being around, rather than in any parcel, they might bring. Similarly, for people who live alone, the gift that means most to them is the visit from people who care about them. Whether such people bring gifts with them or not is very secondary. How we are present to each other, how we receive each other, how we relate to one another, is ultimately more important than what we give to each other.

The gospel reading today is the story of two pregnant women who were fully present to each other. Mary sets out on a long journey to be with her older cousin in her hour of need, staying with her three months. Mary's gift to Elizabeth was the gift of her presence. Just as Mary was fully present to Elizabeth, she in turn was fully present to Mary, fully aware of her.

Mary and Elizabeth were present to each other in such a life-giving way because they were each open to the Lord's presence in their lives. In the response today's responsorial psalm we pray, 'let your face shine on us and we shall be saved'. If we are open to the light of the Lord's face, the light of his presence, we will reflect some of that light onto each other. When we grow in our awareness of the Lord's presence and in our response to his presence, our coming together, our meeting each other, will have more of the graced quality that the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth had.

Mary's generous visit in the gospel reading was matched by Elizabeth's generous welcome, a welcome that recognized Mary's worth and that celebrated her goodness. If Mary shows us how to visit, Elizabeth shows us how to receive a visit. We welcome our visitors by recognizing the good that is in them, by naming the ways the Lord is working in their

lives. Elizabeth recognized Mary's trusting faith in the Lord and she named it, 'blessed is she who believed'. Naming the good in the other is one of the ways that we can be a source of grace and blessing for them.

Like Mary, we too carry the Lord, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit has been poured into our hearts and through the Spirit, the Lord is being formed within us. Yes, we are all a work in progress, but, in virtue of our faith, we carry the mysterious power of God's life, of God's Son within us. Our calling is to allow God's Son that we carry within us to really live in us and through us, so that we can be a source of blessing for others, just as Mary and Elizabeth were for each other. God has given us the most wonderful of Christmas gifts, his own Son wrapped in flesh and blood. Whenever we give this same gift of God's Son to each other, the blessing of Christmas becomes flesh in and through us.

Let us pray

Lord let me be the light in the darkness and become the source of the light of the Lord's Love to others.

Lead me to visit the lonely downtrodden and those in need. Let me learn from Mary how to visit and from Elizabeth how to receive.

Let me take your Son Jesus, the Light of the world, along with me and present the Light of joy happiness and Peace to those whom I visit.

Let me appreciate by naming the good in others

Jesus, I trust in you