

4th Sunday of Advent

On this 4th Sunday of Advent the rather austere figure of John the Baptist gives way to two women who find themselves in situations neither of them would have thought possible or probable, and today's gospel is unusual in that it features two women. Usually men have centre stage in most of the gospel passages, while women had very minor roles. In Luke's gospel women have more evident roles, they are part of Jesus' travelling community and they will be faithful to Jesus to the end as he dies on the cross, abandoned by his male disciples. Luke tells us that the two women trusted in the words God had spoken to them, despite the enormity of those words, Elizabeth well past the age for giving birth, and Mary engaged to Joseph but not yet married. Today's passage with Mary of Nazareth and her cousin Elizabeth is the only section in the gospel where women are given speaking parts that are not followed by a correction!

Our passage begins with Mary going in haste to visit Elizabeth in a place called Ein Karem on the outskirts of Jerusalem, a journey of some 70-80 miles on foot. We notice in this meeting the presence of the Holy Spirit and the joy of the unborn John leaping in Elizabeth's womb as he recognises the unborn Jesus for who he really is. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit declaring Mary to be blessed, as the Mother of Jesus, but also for believing that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled. Mary, we believe, is the one who fulfils the prophecy of Micah in the first reading, when she gives birth in Bethlehem to the one who will be Peace. She could only do this because she had listened to God's word spoken by the angel Gabriel, and agreed to do what God asked of her. 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.' Mary's blessedness is that she believed and trusted that God's promise to her would come true.

Isn't this what Advent asks of us, to trust, to believe and to wait patiently in the hope that what God has promised will be fulfilled. God has promised us new life and Christmas will affirm that promise in the concrete reality of Jesus' birth. The adult Jesus will proclaim a kingdom of peace and love and Jesus will give us his Spirit to bring that kingdom about. This means that we won't sit back and let God take care of the problems of the world while we hide and wait. When the clouds of unrest and turmoil in the world are stirred up it is tempting to avoid the stress and become isolated, keeping others at a distance, for fear that getting close to those who are hurting or are vulnerable might get us involved in trying to ease their pain. But there is no Advent hope in such a course of action, or inaction, it is more despair and surrender to the forces of death.

The Scriptures today don't speak of a withdrawal from the world's problems, rather to an active participation in trying to solve them. As an example of trying to improve difficult situations we might think of Fr Ernesto Cardenal who led Nicaragua from a dictatorship to a democracy, and who was prepared to suffer house arrest and imprisonment, rather than resort violence. He, and others, listened to the word of God and to the needs of people. They trusted that the peace Jesus gives is the way to life and indeed to joy which leads to gratitude. Our contribution to solving problems will likely be much more mundane, but if we listen to God's word, if we trust in God's promises, if we live at peace with ourselves and with others, we will experience joy and gratitude which will help us through dark as well as good times.

Biding Prayers for the 4th Sunday of Advent

Celebrant:

God of hosts turn again, we implore, look down from heaven and see. With these words of the psalm in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

We pray for the Church – that all of us will experience the loving mercy of God in our lives.
Lord in your mercy

We pray for peace in our world, and especially for the people of Chile where elections take place this Sunday – as we move towards the great feast of Christmas we ask the Lord to move the hearts of all people to be reconciled with one another so that all people will be able to live in peace.

Lord in your mercy

We pray in the spirit of the Gospel that we will follow the example of Mary and visit those who are in need, the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly or the lonely.

Lord in your mercy

WE pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit – that they and those who love and care for them, will experience the presence of God and the support of others.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster, and the Covid-19 pandemic and Patrick Tobin, Catherine Mullan, Theresa Carey, Monica Wilde, Kevin Gibson, Elizabeth Mitchell, Fr Daniel Desmond MSC, Anne Buckley, Adelaide Lister, Mary Ward, Louise McMahon, George Henry Newton, May Mills, Vera Ackerley, Christine Burns and Patricia Sparkes whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

In your goodness, Lord, listen to your people's prayer. As we rejoice in the coming of your Son in flesh and blood like ours grant that when he comes again in glory we may receive the gift of eternal life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen