

Homily
4th Sunday of Advent – B

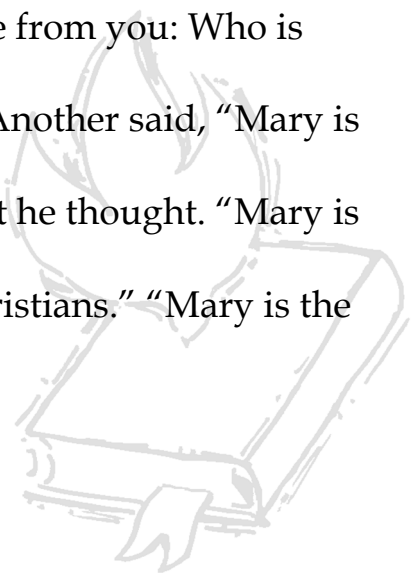
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 19-20, 2020

2 Sm 4: 1-5, 8-11, 16
Ps 89: 2-3, 4-5, 27, 29
Rm 16: 25-27
Lk 1: 26-38

If I asked you today to tell me who “Mary” is to you, how would you reply?

About 150 years ago in a church located in the city of Turin, Italy, Saint John Bosco was preaching about the glory of Mary. During his talk, he suddenly stopped, and addressing the audience asked, “Who among you can tell me who Mary is?” and since nobody dared to reply, he repeated the same question twice, but in such a soft voice that finally someone rose and said, “Mary is God’s Mother.”

“Exactly,” exclaimed Don Bosco, “Mary is the Mother of God, but that’s not enough. I want to learn something else from you: Who is Mary?” One said, “Mary is Queen of Heaven.” Another said, “Mary is the gate of Paradise.” Everyone was saying what he thought. “Mary is the comfort of sinners.” “Mary is the help of Christians.” “Mary is the health of the sick.”



“Very well,” said Don Bosco smiling. “Mary is all that, but much more. I want you to tell me something else.”

When no one answered, the saint said, “I will tell you who Mary is: Mary is our Mother! Yes, our Mother! This is what counts, the main thing for us; and as in the world there is no other person as dear as a mother, no one loved so much and by whom we are loved, no person so willing to grant us benefits and have pity on us, so too in Heaven there is no other saint who so loves us and is so ready to listen to us and sympathize with us as the Blessed Mother.”

The three figures that are the most striking for me during this Advent Season are Joseph, the husband of Mary, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and Mary, the focus of today’s reading. During the weekday Masses this last week, we have been introduced to all the major characters in this Christmas story. We meet Zechariah, a man who questioned the call of the angel in such a way that the angel struck him mute, due to his lack of faith. We meet Joseph, the husband of Mary, a humble man who at first wished to distance himself from Mary until an angel interceded on Mary’s behalf. Most of all, we meet this woman

who gives birth to our God. The reading from second Samuel today tells us that the Arc of the Covenant is so holy that it belongs in a temple instead of a tent. Our gospel today shows us what that temple looks like.

Mary is our temple, our first tabernacle, who provided shelter for the Savior that came into the world. Mary is the holy, pure virgin who totally dedicated her life to loving God and loving us. Because of her love, we celebrate the birth of her son this Christmas.

In today's gospel reading, we focus on the subject of Mary, as we do every Fourth Sunday of Advent. Over the last week or two, we have celebrated two specific feasts that honor our Blessed Mother – the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th) and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th). We honor Mary in such a way because Mary became the first tabernacle of the New Testament, the clean house in which our Lord was first present, via the incarnation. We venerate Mary because her life was clean; her life was stainless and without sin. Because of this stainless life, Mary is honored as the greatest of saints, as the prototype of the type of life our Lord lived on this earth. It is her words in today's gospel that become the goal for anyone who

wishes to live the life of a saint; the minute that any person can say unconditionally, “let it be done to me according to thy word,” the minute that person submits unconditionally to the will of God, it is then that that person’s life becomes clean enough to become a vessel for God.

Mary’s response is a reminder to us all as to what a model response should be like in our lives. It is not a loud, thunderous yell that can be heard from the rooftops but a simple, humble “yes” that can only be heard to our God and to our hearts. It is the kind of yes that is heard in the way we spend time with God and the people that we love. The answer to God’s call can only be found when we take time to listen to the angel and reflect on how that angel is giving us God’s love constantly.

In order to be prepared to receive Christ into our lives, we are challenged to follow the example of Mary by saying the same “yes” to God through our thoughts and actions. To truly understand the gift of the season is to give of ourselves to others so that we become poor in Spirit, in a sense, to serve the needs of others as if they were more important than ourselves. On a surface level, this love affects the way

we deal with our families, but on a deeper level, it must be a love that affects the way we treat the world.

Some 25 years ago, Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador talked about the gift of the Christmas Season as a gift of the poor in spirit, of one caring for the poor and needy to such a degree that we desire to offer every last ounce of God's love for the sake of those in need. He writes,

No one can celebrate a genuine Christmas without being truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud, those who have no need even of God – for them there will be no Christmas. Only the poor, the hungry, those who need someone to come on their behalf, will have that someone. That someone is God, Emmanuel, God-with us. Without poverty of spirit there can be no abundance of God.

El Arzobispo Oscar Romero dijo que nadie puede tener una Navidad verdadera sin ser pobre. Los auto-suficientes; los orgullosos; los que, por tener todo, desprecian a otros; los que no necesitan aun a Dios - para ellos no habrá la Navidad. Solamente los pobres, los hambrientos, los que necesitan que alguien venga de su parte, afirmó el arzobispo, tendrá a aquella persona que es Dios, Emmanuel, Dios con nosotros.

This parish has modeled that call to response by helping out the poor and needy with your donations to the Food Pantry, with your toy and coat donations on behalf of *El Centro Vilaseca* and their ministry to the

poor and needy. As we do each year, we gifted our homebound parishioners with poinsettias from the parish as well as cards written by our grade school children. We have had opportunities for intense prayer through our Adoration evenings, both in English and in Spanish. Our Guadalupe celebrations filled this church with faithful men and women who gave praise to our Blessed Mother and the gift of our Blessed Mother that hangs in the back of our Church. And as we prepare to celebrate Christmas in our lives, we turn again to Mary as the model of service, who became poor in spirit by giving her life to a child, our Savior, the one who freed us from sin.

The parish Masses for Christmas will take place on December 24th at 3:00 & 10:00 p.m. at St. Patrick's and 5:00 p.m. at St. Anne's. On December 25th, our Masses take place at 9:00 a.m. at St. Anne's, 10:30 a.m. at St. Patrick's in English and 12:00 noon in Spanish. I will be celebrating all the Christmas Masses; our Spanish Choir will join me for the 12:00 noon Spanish Mass; Kavin Sampson was nice enough to play organ at all the Christmas Masses at both parishes *except* for the 10:00

p.m. Vigil Mass – there, you will be stuck with me, my guitar and some really bad Christmas music!

Please extend our prayers and love to your families and know that we are praying and caring for all of you both on Christmas Day and every day thereafter. That is the best presence we can offer this season to each other. God Bless you. This is our prayer.