

4th Sunday of Advent B/2008

Suppose that someone has a plan of moving out of Colorado to settle in another state. With such a plan in mind, what he first does is to decide where he wants to go. Second, he examines if he has enough money to buy a new house; then, he prepares the steps to take and when he has to execute his plan.

As far as he has not revealed to friends and neighbors his plan, it remains secret. Once the plan is known, then friends and neighbors can understand why, for instance, when the sales were ongoing, he did not buy anything for fear of excess of things when moving out. St Paul calls such a plan a “mystery”.

In fact, in the second reading, St Paul praises God for the revelation of his secret plan to save all the nations and to bring them under the obedience of one true God, through faith in Jesus Christ. God’s plan of salvation known only to him from all eternity has been hidden to everybody else. The revelation of this plan explains the role of the prophets and the reason why God had sent them.

In order to prepare that plan, God chose David and made him a king in Israel. While at the paroxysms of his glory, David wanted to build a house for God, the prophet Nathan revealed to him that it would not be him, but God himself who would build him an eternal house for him. The prophet Nathan revealed to him also that his kingdom and his throne will endure forever and stand firm forever. God will raise one of his heirs to make his kingdom firm and he will be a father to him and he a son to him.

In the understanding of David and Nathan, this prophecy had a political meaning, because it was all about the reinforcement of David’s dynasty. But in truth, the prophecy had a spiritual scope: God wanted to use an offspring of David in order to give a savior to the world. That savior is Jesus Christ, a descendant of David.

The contrast between David’s dream to build a house for God and God’s response to take care himself of his house teaches us that God’s plans go beyond our expectations and desires. We cannot dictate to God what is good for us and how it should be carried out. We sometimes are disappointed and discouraged when we do not receive exactly what we wanted in our prayer and in the way we wanted. We should not forget, however, that God has his own plan for us. He has his time and his ways to act in our favor. What he wants of us is that we trust him and put our lives into his hands. Then, we understand why, while Israel was expecting a strong and powerful king, God sent a poor and defenseless child, Jesus Christ. That is God’s surprise. Happy are those who, like Mary, welcome God’s plan and surprise.

That is the point of today’s Gospel. First, Luke wants to teach us that Jesus has a transcendental origin. He is not born from a human desire, but from God. That is why he is the son of the most high whose kingdom will never have an end. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to David. Secondly, Luke tells us how God’s plan of salvation came to be realized in the person of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and in the life of Mary as the one who said yes to God.

By choosing Mary to be the mother of his son, God lets human beings participate in his plan of salvation. As he once chose the prophets to act on his behalf for the sake of his people, so God chose a woman, Mary, to bear his son into the world, for the salvation of the world. Human dignity is brought here to the highest level: we count a lot for God.

On this Sunday we celebrate the humility of God who accepts to be involved in our humanity, but we celebrate also the humility of Mary who said yes, on our behalf, to God's plan. By deciding to send his son into the world, God joins the history of mankind in a more tangible way than before. He becomes one of us and he wants us to partake in the divine life.

The "yes" of Mary opens the door to the incarnation since she allows God to become one of us. By her obedience, the kingdom of God becomes a reality on earth and our humanity is admitted into God's heavenly presence for eternity. Without this reminder there would be a thousand ways of celebrating Christmas, but Mary shows us the right one. Openness of heart to God, availability and trust in God, are virtues we need to develop in this time of Advent as we prepare ourselves to the birth of Jesus. It is impossible to fulfill any ministry in the Church and for our brothers and sisters when we are selfish and locked in ourselves.

We see all these virtues at work in the life of Mary as the Angel Gabriel surprises her with the announcement of becoming the mother of the savior of the world. With the greeting of the angel, Mary is perplexed and wondering how she could perform such a mission, but she trusted God. The same is true for each one of us. However difficult might be the mission God is willing to give us, he can help us to carry it out successfully for the glory of his name. After all, "nothing" is impossible to God. Let us never forget that he is always ready to sustain us and help us.

Let me finish by recalling the answer of Mary: "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word". Here Mary gives us all a lesson of generosity, availability and unselfish love. Like Mary, God calls us to a particular mission in our lives and in the Church. When we do our best to fulfill it with joy, he takes care of the rest. David wanted to build a house for God, but God wanted to do more than that. Like Mary, God wants us to be the house of his presence. He calls us to radiate his presence to a world that longs for a savior. Let us repeat this little prayer in the silence of our heart: "O come o come, Emmanuel. Transform me in your image. Make me a sign of your presence in the world. O come and make your dwelling in me". God bless you all!

2 Samuel 7, 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16, 25-27; Luke 1, 26-38



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