

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Advent Year B, 2023

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Today, we light the fourth candle, which is called the candle of love. The circle is complete. Hope (first candle) brings Peace. Peace (second candle) brings Joy. Joy (third candle) brings Love. The first Christmas happened because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). God loves us first (1 John 4:19). "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). We live in love and in God when we appreciate and reciprocate God's love by sharing his love with fellow human beings. By so doing, Christmas is properly celebrated. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have received from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:20-21). May the Advent journey and Christmas celebration enable us to become channels of God's love.

Have you ever concluded what you considered an excellent plan, made all necessary arrangements, and when you were about to execute the plan, you were stopped by an authority or by an incident? Different people respond or react in different ways. Some people get very upset and disobedient. In their disobedience, they go ahead with their plan. Some people get very upset; they do not go ahead with their plan; but they refuse to cooperate with other plans. Some people feel disappointed but are very willing to proceed with alternative plans.

In the first reading, although David had a wonderful plan of building a temple for the Lord, the Lord had his own plan. The Lord's plan was that the temple would be built by David's heir. David accepted the Lord's plan. However, David went ahead to make preparations for building the temple. He procured all the materials needed for the building of the temple (1 Chronicles 22).

Mary, in the gospel, was engaged to Joseph and was already living with Joseph's family. Before Mary could move into Joseph's house as his wife, the angel brought her the message that she was to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. Though greatly troubled, Mary accepted God's plan. She said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

David and Mary teach us how not to insist on our own plan and will when all signs and signals show that God has other plans instead of ours. We may not be privileged as Mary to experience the appearance of an angel to deliver God's message to us. God speaks to us through his Word, through life experiences, and through our fellow human beings. God did not send an angel to David but a human being, Prophet Nathan. It is, therefore, important to listen and accept God's Word. It is important to see God's presence in experiences and discern what God is saying through the experiences. It is important to listen to good and wise counsels. Prophet Amos tells us, "Indeed, the Lord God does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). In Luke 16:29, Abraham replied to the rich man: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them

listen to them." When God reveals his plans to his 'Moses' and his 'prophets' and sends them to us, we pray that we may receive them and listen to them.

What David said to Prophet Nathan is quite striking, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent!" (2 Samuel 7:2). Indeed, many people, many families, many institutions, many places, and so on are living in houses of cedar but have moved God to dwell in a tent. This is to say that God is given little or no consideration in their activities and plans. Anywhere God is forced out, the Evil One takes over. The result is so much chaos within and around us.

Wanda Jackson sang many years ago "How do you treat God? How do you treat God like a God? Like a G O D or a D O G? ... Do you throw him a bone and then go home and live as you please ..."

In the gospel, Mary accepted the Holy Spirit to come upon her and the power of the Most-High to overshadow her, and she became a dwelling place for God. As we celebrate Christmas, as the year ends, and looking forward to the new year, we pray that the Holy Spirit comes upon us and the power of the Most-High overshadows to redirect us as David was redirected; and redefine us as Mary was redefined.

We pray Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Amen.

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