

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Advent Year C 2024

Micah 5:1-4; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

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 from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (1 John 4:20-21). Lighting the candle of love is our prayer that love may conquer hate and animosity. May the Advent journey and Christmas celebrations enable us to become channels of God’s love.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached, “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Rev. John Guun writes: “Of all the dark passions that smite the human soul, hate is the darkest. If you hate another, it hurts you more than the one you hate. Hate will make you nervous, restless, apprehensive . . . Hate is like a cancer; it will eat your heart out.”

Even when people refuse our love, or keep hating and hurting us despite our efforts to reconciliation and peace, Jesus advises us to love them, which means that we do not retaliate. Jesus advises us to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:45). St. Paul puts it this way, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing, you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good” (Romans 12:20-21). In a way, the “burning coals” is the “cancer” that eats the heart of the person who rejects peace, love, and reconciliation.

As we are approaching the celebration of Christmas, the action of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as we read in today’s gospel, helps us to reflect on our relationship with one another and on our spiritual journey.

The angel said to Mary, “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:37-37). The gospel says, “Mary sets out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Luke 1:39).

Mary set out, in haste, to visit Elizabeth. She was not directed by the angel to go over and help Elizabeth. She was not sent for by Elizabeth. In her heart of compassion, she reasoned that her elderly pregnant relative needed help. So, she set out in haste to help. She stayed with Elizabeth for three months; which means that Mary stayed with Elizabeth until Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist.

We remember that Mary responded the same way at the wedding at Cana when the wine ran out. Without being asked, she saved the couple from embarrassment by letting Jesus know that “They have no wine.” Then, Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Mary’s thoughtfulness and generous response are a challenge to our, sometimes, insensitivity to matters that concern other people.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped for joy in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary’s presence filled Zechariah’s house with joy and the Holy Spirit. The presence of Mary radiated joy and the Holy Spirit. Does our presence radiate joy and the Holy Spirit or sadness and bad spirit?

Elizabeth exclaimed, “How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43). The understanding that she was the mother of God humbled Mary rather than feelings of pride and self-importance. Can we be a bit gentle and humble with whatever or whoever we think we are?

Elizabeth said to Mary, “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Luke 1:45). What was spoken by the angel about Mary came to fulfillment. O Lord, not the evil one’s will, not human’s will, and not our will; but as Mary prayed, “May it be done to [us] according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Amen.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary intercede for us, that through the graces of the Advent season, hope, peace, joy, and love may rise in our hearts and flush out despair, conflicts, sadness, hate, and pride. Amen.

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