

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle C

December 20, 2009

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Today as we get so close to Christmas on Friday, we focus this Sunday of course on our Blessed Mother. All the readings every year focus on the Mother who's soon to give birth to the Son. If you listen to the opening prayer it says, "The Word became flesh on earth when Mary put her will to the service of God's plan." She did everything and put her will and her yes to the service of God's plan. The Gospel today says, "Blessed is she who believed. Blessed are you who believed that the Lord's words to you would be fulfilled." That the gift that Mary gives us is her gift of faith. My homily today I am going to steal from St. Bernard of Clairvaux almost 5000 years ago. In the office of readings for the day, which is the priest and religious we have to pray Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Daytime Prayer, Night Prayer and the Office of Readings. The Office of Readings consists of three Psalms, a Scripture Reading and then a homily from somebody. So today's is from St. Bernard of Clairvaux and he talks about Mary. He looks at Mary like he is in a dialogue with Mary and says, "Mary, the whole world. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Adam and Eve they are all waiting for you Mary for you to say yes, when the angel appears to her. Say yes Mary." And then he says, "Mary don't be afraid. Don't be afraid Mary." And then he gives her the advice – "Believe, give praise, and receive." Believe, give praise and receive.

Belief is the gift Mary gives to us because of her yes Christ is born on the earth. As Mother Theresa of Calcutta said many years ago, "No Mary, no Jesus." That we are very dependent on the Blessed Mother. Now again we are not worshipping the Blessed Mother. She is not taking the place of Jesus. People who believe this got to be a little nuts. It is because you don't understand. You know anyone who loves Jesus, loves who Jesus loved. Jesus loved and Jesus still loves Mary. And if anyone says I don't need her then what you do is you make yourself greater than Jesus Christ. Christ, who is God, by the Divine will, needed Mary. He needed her "yes" or would not have become a man. He needed her free will to choose to say yes to God's will. And she did and that is how the Word became flesh because of Mary. And if Mary taught Christ in His humanity so she can teach us how we need to believe. She did not have to teach Christ how to believe, but she had to teach Christ how to live. And so Mary can do with us. That is why it is important that we have devotion to our Blessed Mother. That we ask her to pray for us. We ask her to intercede for us especially at Christmas but all of the days of our life. Fr. Wright spoke on at the 8:30am Mass, "now that means you are going to all say the rosary and you are going to do this." And that is a good thing.

I have said that many times that we become people who do that. When we say the rosary for instance nobody has looked at Jesus more than Mary, right. Saw him being born. Watch Him his whole life. Saw Him at Calvary. Saw Him every day. Christ was not looked upon by any human eyes more than He was looked upon by the Mother of God, Mary. When I had to wear my glasses before I got these contacts, when I would take off my glasses, my cheaters as they are called and I would put them on. I would put them on and if I get stuck at the glass that would really be stupid. I put them on so I could see the print better. Mary is like a pair of glasses. She helps us to see Jesus Christ better and more focused because we see Him through her eyes. And everything she does, she does because of Christ. God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. So Mary is alive. Just like you can come to me and say, "Hey Father can you pray for me?" Of course I can pray for you. "Hey Father can you give me fifty bucks?" If I have fifty bucks I can give you fifty bucks. Am I taking the place of God? I am just being the instrument of God. Mary in no way takes the place of God. She does not get worship. We don't pray to her if you will. She

prays with us. She intercedes with her Son who intercedes with us constantly. If you never go to Mary, never ask a saint to pray for you. Don't you ever ask another human being to pray for you. Because what you are doing if you say that is you are saying, "I can't ask you to pray for me because there is only one intercessor, Jesus Christ. You can't do anything for me so I not going to ask you." Be real and be logical. If you have ever asked anybody on earth to pray for you, then you can't ask any of the saints to pray for you because they are alive and they see the face of God.

So what does Mary teach us? Mary teaches us, first of all that we need to be people who believe. A friend of mine called me the other day from California. One of his secretary's is a Jehovah Witness. I made some judgments about it and I said, "That has got to be one of the weirdest religions ever." He says, "Yes, they believe this and that." I said, "Mormon's are weird too." We talked about all of them. Then in the midst of that I said, "But you know looking from the outside Catholicism can be pretty weird too." Christianity can become pretty weird. We look at it from faith, but let us look at it from an outsider's point. Here is a woman, 14 years old, a baby, a girl, and an angel appears to her and says, "Hey Mary you are going to conceive without knowing anybody, without knowing any man, you are going to conceive and have a baby. This baby will be God." "Oh, okay." Then when she had to go tell Joseph. "Hey Joseph, you know I am going to be married to you but you know Joseph I am pregnant. But I wasn't with anybody else, just God and God gave me this baby." Think about it for a moment. See, faith is believing in the impossible. That is what it is by definition. Faith is not faith until there is nothing left to hold onto. And of all the things we have to believe, we have to make this jump believing in things that are not possible. That the God of the universe became a man; that it was dependent upon the yes of a woman. That the God of the universe would humble Himself and become flesh and blood for us in the Eucharist. That someone else would die for our sins when I should be the one who has to die for my own sins, to do my own consequences. We are saved by the grace of Christ who died for me. It takes faith.

What we have got to do is make sure that we, like Mary, are people of faith. If you are not a real person of faith in your heart of hearts, if you don't really believe this stuff then you go to Mary and you say, "Mary, can you pray for me that I can have great faith like you did? That when everything seemed impossible, you said yes to the will of the Father. You brought life to the world." When everything seems impossible in our life, when it seems as dark as dark can be and we can look at God and say, "God, I trust in You." Why, because He is worthy of trust. That God is not a liar. God is worthy of our faith. He is worthy of our belief. So what we do when we are confronted with the impossible; when we are confronted with someone else who paid for my sins; we are confronted with bread and wine become God; when we are confronted with all of these things that were taught from the very beginning of the church. When we are confronted with this and we don't understand it we say I don't understand it, but I believe. And when you believe you are saying, "God you are worthy of trust." What St. Bernard says is, "Okay Mary, believe," she did that, "now give praise." Meaning, stop focusing on yourself Mary and how unworthy you are and start focusing on God and how worthy He is. That is what we have got to do. After we believe we stop looking at ourselves and looking at what I can and can't do and look at God. We say, "I praise You. I honor You. You are God. You can do anything. I believe that and I worship that. That when you and I truly believe, then we praise God for that. We stop focusing on ourselves and we start focusing on Him who can do anything.

Then we receive whatever it is that God wants to give us whatever it is. When Mary said yes I believe, yes, praise God, she received the God of the universe inside of her. That is the first thing that faith does

for all of us. The first thing that faith does, the first thing we need faith in is to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. We say yes Lord I believe in you and I ask you to save me. Come into my heart. Take control of my life. Help me to forget about myself and focus on my salvation. Mary did that, right. When she says in Luke's Gospel, the Magnificat, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior," did Christ save Mary? Absolutely, positively. She was saved by grace but at the moment she was conceived. That is the point. Everything has to do with Christ. Even that gift that was given to her at that moment of conception what had to happen is she received that gift in its fullness when she said yes to the will of God. She received Christ inside of her. When you were baptized you were given the grace of a beautiful gift of salvation. But what has to happen is you have to receive that gift for yourself when you say yes to God. You receive Him more fully into your life. Christmas is a great time to do it.

So as we prepare for the birth of Christ we look at Mary who knew Christ intimately and as she believed, gave praise and received, so must we believe, give praise and receive. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? Good. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.