

## ADVENT 4 B 2011

In just 7 days Christmas will be here. Meanwhile the purpose of Advent is still before us: it is to warn us, to prepare us for the event of the Christ Child. We have read the history of God's dealings with his people in the lessons of these four weeks of Advent. We come now to the announcement – the Annunciation – to Mary of the coming of a child.

Throughout the year we speak of one of our core beliefs; as expressed by Paul in this Letter to the Romans; obedience of faith. But nothing so easily and adequately sums up this doctrine as does Mary's words: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Mary uses the same short sentence of acceptance as used by Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah – 'here am I.'

Mary was responding, in faith, to the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This was a message that would truly turn the world upside down. Paul's statement in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians can help us to better understand God's actions to Mary and through her to us.

“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world.”

This is the manifesto of a revolution – God's revolution. The devaluation of human pride and the re-evaluation of the outcast of the earth. Mary sang this message in the Magnificat; “He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” Over the years we have heard those words; we have said them; we have sung them; but have we really listened to them? Have we really heard them? Those words speak of a revolution – a timeless revolution – begun, but not finished.

Perhaps it all happened too long ago. Few of us have any real rapport with Pharisees and Sanhedrins, Caesars and other first century affairs. Rome has fallen; the temples are in ruins. God's revolution – the turning of the world upside down is done – over and finished- centuries ago. Or, at least we so chose to think.

In our human pride we tend to equate the way we live with the Kingdom of God. Too often this blinds us to John the Baptist's rejection of injustice; Joseph's caring acceptance; Mary's humble faith and the self-sacrificial love of the Messiah. We make the mistake of not seeing that God does not need our wisdom or our pride. Perhaps all too often we seek to live like the Pharisees but to receive the forgiveness of the publican. Can we dare to allow God's word to change us so that we might be infused with faith in his present and coming Kingdom? We might well consider Mary's response to God's messenger: 'But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.' That was the firm sign of her

faith, the evidence that she took God's message seriously. True faith is always honest. True always ponders. Not asking questions, not raising troublesome points, not being concerned stands as the sign of weak faith – of untested faith. It is right to hail this young woman, who was so courageous, so faithful, and so utterly honest. Later Christians gave her many titles, but one, 'the God Bearer, is supreme. Mary was the bearer of God's express image, the icon of God, Jesus the Christ.

But this was a troubled teenager. She was filled with a divine discontent. Mary knew the reality of the divine in that moment, the terrible majesty and ineffable mystery. She was held by the dread power, and the overwhelming enfolding love of her Creator. This was a moment of revelation – religious experience in its primal mode. But what is all of this to us?

Are we not also troubled? We are troubled by the actions and failures of those around us – our families, our friends, and our elected officials. And we are certainly troubled by our own failures. But the age of deep religious experiences is never past. Its potential lies within each of us. God's Spirit still moves across the face of the earth. The Spirit moves across polluted lakes and streams, disintegrating cities, war torn countries, and the Spirit over the waters of Baptism. The Spirit hovers over hospital beds, broken marriages, burned out hopes, and over the person coming forth to be confirmed in faith. The kingdom comes to us during trouble, disturbance, perplexity, but also, in the joy of a silver wedding anniversary, and in the smile of a child praying before the Crèche.

The King continues to reveal Himself in our needs, in the faces of the homeless, the hungry, and the abused. The King comes to us in seven days as the Child of Bethlehem that we may hear and see the needs with the clarity and concentration of that child that remains within each of us.

Welcome the King. Welcome the Child of Bethlehem. That we may respond in faith as Mary responded.

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Maranatha – Come Lord – Come- Maranatha