

Recognize within your lives the action and power of God

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December 18, 2005 – Fourth Sunday of Advent and Mass for the Rite of Acolyte Installation

(Given at the Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo, ND)

Our readings for this weekend point to the great mystery of Jesus Christ and the promise of Christ to us, His people. In the first reading, we hear of David who wants to build a house for the Lord. He is finally at peace with everyone. He thinks, “I will build this temple for the Lord.” Nathan, the prophet, tells him to move forward. Then the Lord speaks to Nathan and reminds him that the temple that David can build is a transitory temple. It is a temple that will one day be destroyed. But the temple that is promised is an eternal temple.

My sisters and brothers, look at the language that is used throughout that passage of the action of God and the people of Israel. It is God's work; it is God who establishes all. He is the one who has conquered their enemies. He is the one who has led Israel. He is the one who has established the house of Israel. He will give them far greater than a temple. He will give them a Divine kingdom that will last forever. “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me” (2 Sm 7:14). The promise is given and the people of Israel await.

In the Gospel reading, we hear of the fulfillment of that promise. In the great announcement that is given to Mary, she is told, as the angel appears to her, that she is full of grace. She is troubled by

what she hears, but she continues to listen. "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:31). Mary listens to that word, her heart possibly harkening back to the promise of the Messiah. But she still does not understand. "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Lk 1:34). Then the angel reveals to her a far greater mystery, a far greater wonder, a far greater love -- that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and she will conceive and bear a child. The angel reminds her of Elizabeth and reminds us "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37). In hearing that news, Mary bows her head and says, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

My dearest sisters and brothers, as we approach this last week of Advent, let us meditate upon the Scriptures that the Church gives to us. First, let us recognize within our own lives the action and the power of God. He is the one who gives us salvation. It is His work, as are all the virtues within our life. It is not our work. We are not the ones building the kingdom. We are not the ones who bring salvation. We cannot save ourselves as sinners. Jesus Christ, and He alone, saves us and gives us redemption. It is God's work. What then must we do? When we look at that truth, we can see what we are called to do in Mary. Look at Mary and see how she responds.

She listens. She listens to the Word of God and takes it to heart. Even though she has some questions, she is honest in giving them over to the Lord. "How can this be?" She listens even more. Then she trusts. She trusts that for God nothing is impossible. She trusts in His word, is receptive to it and finally makes herself a total self gift to the Lord. "I am the handmaid," she responds. In the Greek, it is "I am the 'slave'; I am the servant; I give myself totally to you." She continues, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

My dearest daughters and sons, we too must have those qualities of listening, of trusting and of being

receptive to God's call. Once we receive those qualities, we must make ourselves a total self gift to our God so that His Word may become flesh within us. How often do you and I argue with God, saying "This cannot be possible...I cannot overcome this sin...I cannot overcome this impatience," thinking we are the ones who must do it? We must turn to God and seek His patience, seek His wisdom and seek His love. We must surrender to Him as Mary did, trusting in our God completely -- that He will enter the wounds of our sin, that He will enter into our brokenness, and that He will accomplish within us all that He has promised.

(Speaking to Geary McCleery, who was being installed into the Rite of Acolyte for the Permanent Diaconate) Geary, today as you become an acolyte, you are called by the Church to serve her. You are called to serve at the altar and to distribute Holy Communion. In doing so, you come closer to the greatest sacrifice that our God has entrusted to us and to His Church. That is the sacrifice of the Eucharist, in which Jesus Himself listened, trusted and became receptive to the call of the Father, making Himself a total self gift. You are called to the same as an acolyte. You are called, as every disciple is called, to unite yourself ever more closely to that mystery, and to give yourself in service to Christ and to the Church. As you do that, meditate upon the great mystery of the Eucharist. See within that mystery the presence of Christ Himself. They are no longer simple gifts of bread and wine; they are the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. They are the person of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, whom you are entrusted to distribute. You are entrusted to distribute Holy Communion to those who are sick and to those who come to Mass. You are entrusted by God and by the Church to distribute that great mystery of the person of Christ. Understand the call that is given to you and live out that call.

My dearest sisters and brothers, as we continue with our celebration of the Eucharist today, let us contemplate this week, with Mary, the great mystery that we will celebrate next Sunday on Christmas Day. Let us contemplate upon the mystery of the Word made flesh. Let us pray during this Eucharist

for the grace of listening; not with all of our answers running through our minds as David's were when he wanted to build the temple, but with the grace of listening to the Word of God. Let that Word penetrate our hearts and our minds. Let us pray for the grace of receptivity and the grace of trust, begging Mary to intercede for us that we may have her receptivity and her trust. Let us pray that we too may come to recognize that, with God, nothing is impossible. Within the very depth of our hearts and the very depth of our beings, we will be able to say with Mary, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your Word."