

Commentary to the 4th Sunday of Advent



Message: Mary gives the supreme example of a disciple of Jesus. Of all our race she alone sought happiness only in God's will. You probably noticed that we have lit all four candles of our advent wreath. Today we celebrate the final Sunday before Christmas and with this homily I conclude the series: Preparing Our Hearts. Preparing Our Hearts for Jesus. Last week we saw the example a big-hearted man: John the Baptist. He invested his talents of preaching, praying and simplicity for the good of others. In his case the ultimate good - salvation of souls. We also that he gave the most beautiful gift - humility.

Humility opens our hearts to a relationship with God and with others. We see John's humility in this way: Even though Jesus says, "no man born of woman is greater than John," John does not exalt himself. No, when he sees Jesus, he says, "I am not worthy to untie his sandal strap." Thus John shows what you and I have to do prepare our hearts: First, invest our talents to the full and then recognize that anything we give pales before what Jesus gives us.

We are like a flash of light; Jesus is the sun. John teaches us that. Since God made us male and female it's logical that along with John we have a feminine example of self-giving and humility. Before telling you about her, I would like to mention a couple of books that helped me reflect on the gifts of masculinity and femininity. One is titled, *For Men Only*. Based on scientific research and in-depth interviews, it tells what men should know about women. I found the book illuminating. After finishing

For Men Only, I was curious about what women need to know about us, so I got For Women Only.

I recommend these books - great Christmas presents! God made us male and female. There's a great mystery in all this, as well as a never-ending source of humor and confusion! But also marvelous gifts in both masculinity and femininity. It should not surprise us, then, that parallel to John the Baptist we have a woman who is the supreme Christian disciple, the most beautiful example of self-giving and humility. You know who I mean: Mary! Apart from Jesus, Mary has the greatest role in our salvation. She held God-made-man in her womb. Just as we genuflect before the tabernacle because it contains Jesus' Body, so we would genuflect before Mary - not because she is God or a goddess, but because she carries God Incarnate within her. But does Mary say, "Look at me"? No, she says, "I am the handmaid of the Lord." Then she rushes to Elizabeth, six-months pregnant with John.

I have been with moms who had their first baby later in life. It is no picnic for them. Elizabeth is beyond child-bearing age. What joy to see her young cousin come to her! Mary is a humble servant. She focuses not on herself, but on others. Early Christian writers call Mary the New Eve. Just as Christ is the New Adam so Mary is the New Eve. Eve is our common mother; we all descended from her. Mary is the mother all the baptized. What is the difference between Mary and Eve? Both are extremely beautiful women, but Eve unfortunately tried to find happiness apart from God and she brought misery into the world.* Mary on the other hand sought happiness only in doing God's will. Her "yes" as we heard in today's Gospel began a process of restoration and redemption.

Redemption means somehow buying back human misery and converting it into something better than what we could have hoped for. Misery becomes mercy. Pope Benedict gave a reflection on the importance of Mary.** He said that when Christ was born, every creature offered a sign of gratitude: the angels, a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, admiration; the earth, a cave. But, asked the Holy Father, what about the human race? What do we have to offer God? Pope Benedict answered simply: What we have to offer is the Virgin Mary herself. She shows what humanity is capable of.

For sure, you and I suffer from an inner division called original sin - and we have many personal failings. But when we look at the Virgin Mother, we recognize the true capacity of our human nature. To use a phrase from the Book of Judith, Mary is the "greatest boast of our race." (15:9) With Mary we bring to a close our series on Preparing Our Hearts. She gives the supreme example of a disciple of Jesus. Of all our race she alone sought happiness only in God's will. We ask her motherly intercession so that in some measure we can also say, "May it done to me according to your word." Amen.

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