

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 4th Sunday Advent Year C2

Somebody recently shared with me some of their homemade Christmas candy (does anybody have any candy around? Yes, everyone at this time of year!) Well, this candy is a recipe of an almond bark covered combination of marshmallows, chow mein noodles pretzels, simple m&m's and (here is secret ingredient)-fruit loops! I think they called it reindeer food. I called it '**addictive**'. But I'm known to be a nibbler, so I break off some and walk through the house and then come back through by the coffee pot saying 'Oh, just another little bite' and that goes on until I say, "Is that bag empty?" But, oh, aren't fruit loops sweet? And I must say that when I was a kid we loved them and had them all the time (Do you remember all of the old cereal mascots--right up there with Frosted Flakes- Tony Tiger, was the multi colored Toucan Sam with Fruit Loops!) Until my mother figured out that my brother had some kind allergy to the red dye (I don't recall if it was red #3 or red# 40) but she did her 'live tests' to watch how a bowl of fruit loops sent my brother into stratospheric highs, flying like Toucan Sam. (Hyper-Activity). So, we all ended up fasting from Fruit Loops after that discovery. But I recall one phrase she always used with us kids when we were super excited. It was, "Come sit down over here. Have you got ants in your pants?" So we were jumpy, moved around a lot or were little overly animated!

Well, what I want to suggest about today's gospel is that it seems like everyone who has the Holy Spirit within them also seems to exhibit similar exuberance and high activity! For example, the angel Gabriel had told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High overshadow you" (1:35), and what does Mary immediately do, but she runs off to visit Elizabeth. But does she just run, NO it says she "runs in haste' 1:39 to hill country (**run-up hills!**) of Judea. But this excitement spreads, because then in Luke 1:41 arriving to Elizabeth's home, upon "hearing Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in Elizabeth's womb, and filled with the holy Spirit, she" So John in the womb of Elizabeth who is now also filled with the Holy Spirit, he dances upward within, when Mary (and Jesus in womb) appears at the doorstep. So, for sure, wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is joy, excitement and exuberance (and that it is a contagious exuberance that one must share!). We find this theme all through the writing of Luke. Here is a neat parallel Luke sets up from this whole birth experience of Jesus to Mary--most importantly, this detail-the conception of Jesus within her by The Holy Spirit's descent upon her. Okay, this is the beginning of Luke's Gospel-but if we take that event and compare it to the beginning of his second volume the Acts of the

Apostles, what do we find? Oh, there in first Acts, another person-a group this time is gathered in prayer when the Holy spirit shows up and **overshadows** them (I'm talking about the apostles and Mary in upper room) and the instant the Spirit fills them, they go rushing out into the street (filled with energy), charging off telling good news to everyone (like Mary rushing off to tell Elizabeth). So, clearly, wherever the Holy Spirit shows up, people get to moving and going outward from themselves to tell good news and do good work in Jesus' name.

In the church, we call that evangelizing! When people have been given great grace and they can't wait to go tell others or give to others the wonders that have been placed in their lap. But I find a comparison between that type of reaction-the Spirit Comes and People GO! In almost all of the Christmas stories we talk about, we see this. I am suggesting that the Christmas message is all about getting out, of going out of ourselves sharing goodness (Holy Spirit) with others-or what we might simply call visiting (of course Our Gospel account is called the Joyful Mystery- Visitation!)

Let's make a list of them in the Christmas Story: Angel visits Zechariah, an Angel visits Mary, Mary visits Elizabeth, (also Jesus visits John), Mary & Joseph take trip we can easily imagine him running into & visiting other Joseph-Clan folks at Bethlehem Census Headquarters, Angels visit shepherds, Shepherds visit Mary/Joseph/Jesus, then the shepherds go visit everyone in hills/villages ('telling it on mountain'), and then Wise men get in on visiting, and they take it back home, and then Mary/Joseph visit on over to Egypt, until the next chapter of salvation history begins. It all adds up to a whole lot of evangelizing or visiting that involves sharing celebrating good things with others. And isn't that exactly what Mary, the apostles and early church do in beginning of Book of Acts of Apostles: they are filled with Spirit, and they go out into the streets and to ends of earth. And I love how we continue such visiting traditions in current Christmas season practices-customs. Like making all this extra home-baking-We make so much because you 'gotta' go share it and give it to somebody. Also, the custom of caroling which is like evangelizing because you have great message/great music and you sing it out in the streets to neighbors or anyone passing by, or how folks host Open Houses or Walk-Throughs, which is the whole idea behind decorating (we decorate for others to come /see). Come through & check out new lights, colors, ribbons, displays-something to talk about, and then there is all the children's excitement about a certain other visitor (call him Kris, Nicholas, or Santa), but just take a moment to consider all the visiting traditions associated with Christ's birth. And that brings us back to where I started,

which was talking about Red #3 or Red #40, that makes someone so excited. My point is that when the Holy Spirit enters us, or comes visiting down upon us, we can't help but get out of ourselves, sharing such enthusiasm and going out to others too. So may this Christmas bring us such an evangelizing Spirit; a spirit of getting out of ourselves, going out and sharing good things with others. As Mary said, "God has done, great things for me (Luke 1:49)" and so her response is to reciprocate and go out do and great things for others (give us a Savior!) So we should do too. Not that what we do is great, but simply the doing it for someone is (How does Tony Tiger say it?) Grrreat! Yes, this turned out to be a cereal homily. So, may Christmas invite such holy visiting and bringing such 'greatness' to birth in the humble lives of all of us, as Jesus' followers!