

## **4TH SUND. ADVENT (B)**

### **ARE YOU READY TO HOUSE THE LORD?**

We read from the scriptures that when Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, they did not find any place to lay their heads, save a manger where the Saviour was born. At this time of the season of Advent, it is like the holy couple in search of a place to lodge. Who will offer them a place, and who is ready to house the Saviour?

In the first reading, David planned to build a house for the Lord. His good intention won for him a great promise, that God Himself would make for him a great name, fix a place for the people of Israel, and from him shall come an heir who would be the Son of God.

When the time came for this promise to be fulfilled, God needed somebody, and Mary said yes, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Mary was ready to house the Lord, both in Her womb and in Her house. Her "fiat" gained for Her, blessedness, as She said, "all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me." The question She posed to the angel indicates that She had made Her house ready: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" The angel assured Her that the Holy Spirit would come upon Her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow Her. God willing to live among men? Yes.

The Lord God is always ready to live among His creatures, especially among His children. In the ancient times His presence was felt by His words written on tablets, and kept in the Ark which was placed under the tent, and David was not happy about it, and therefore, decided to do something. This Word is made flesh and wants to live among us like one of us. But who is ready to offer Him a place? Do we consider Him a welcome guest or unwanted visitor?

As Mary and Joseph found it difficult to get a place, so it is now. The world today has no place for the Saviour. For many people, He is an unwanted guest. Many of us have filled our houses with all kinds of stuff that we have no room for Him. Our minds are on material things and so have no room for any other thing. Our hearts have no room for spiritual reflections on the incarnation and our salvation. Rather they are filled with social recognition, and legal and political emancipation.

Many of us cannot say yes to the Lord, because we feel Christ has many things with Him when He comes, and may demand so much that we cannot

meet it. We consider Him a burden because of His rule and regulations. He is an unwelcome guest because we have not cleaned up, and we are not ready to clean up the filth stored in our houses.

Unfortunately, the laws we make for ourselves are even more burdensome to carry out than those of Christ. It is the Lord who can strengthen us, as St. Paul is telling us today. If we are ready to host Him in our lives, He will come and dwell with us and we will find fulfilment in our daily lives. He told His disciples; "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him," (Jn. 14:23). This is seen in the lives of David and Mary in today's readings. David wanted to build a permanent dwelling place for the Lord to show his love for and gratitude to the Lord. Mary received the word from the angel, and as a result She became the new Ark of the Covenant.

If we think that Christmas is a historical event and so has little impact on us in its celebration, what about receiving the Lord in the Eucharist? Do we always consider the reception of communion as the Lord Jesus coming to dwell within us? How clean is our house, that is, our hearts, when we approach the Eucharist? What preparations do we make before we enter the church, and when we come what do we do? We are to remember that God wants to be with us, that Christ is Emmanuel - God is with us.

### **3RD SUND. ADVENT (B)**

#### **IN MY GOD IS THE JOY OF MY SOUL**

The prophet Isaiah talks about the Messiah who has been sent to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. He rejoices in the Lord, and in his God is the joy of his soul. He is rejoicing because of what God has done for him. In a similar way, when Mary was expecting to give birth to the Saviour, She rejoiced in the Lord, because God had done great things for her. Mary reveals again what the Messiah is to accomplish; that is, to fill the hungry with good things and raise the lowly.

St. Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica to rejoice always, to pray constantly, to give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for them in Christ Jesus. So he reveals to them three important things which the Lord requires - to rejoice in Him, to pray, and to give thanks.

Today is known as Gaudate Sunday, a day of joy, because the coming of the Lord is close at hand. The promised Messiah will be born in a few days time. The children of God are to rejoice because the time to set the captives free and heal the brokenhearted is imminent. He is the light of the world John came to testify to.

The testimony of John should encourage us to wait patiently for the Lord, and rejoice greatly in Him. This is because, the Jews considered John as the Messiah because of his way of life and preaching, but he told them that he was just the voice, and the friend of the bridegroom, then the Messiah is great indeed and in Him one has to rejoice. John tells us how important Christ is. John told them that he did not deserve even to be the servant of the Christ they were waiting for.

What brings us joy, and in what do we rejoice? People rejoice when their favourite team wins; others when they receive a gift from a friend; students also find joy when their classwork and exams are excellent, and businessmen, when everything goes on well with business. Do these situations bring lasting joy? They bring joy to some extent. After some time something erodes all the joy experienced.

Isaiah would rejoice heartily in the Lord, and in God the joy of his soul; Mary rejoiced in God her Saviour. The good things we find difficult to do are the ones which bring us joy, but what we find it easy to do and we think will bring us peace and joy rather ends up causing us much pain and sadness. Good brings joy, while evil brings sadness. That is why in the second reading, St.

Paul is urging the believers to retain what is good and refrain from every kind of evil.

We are preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, but what we often hear is happy holidays, and not merry christmas. People's minds are on the merry-making activities and not what brought about the holidays, the birth of the Saviour. Christmas has lost its spiritual meaning. Even before the celebrations start, cautions are sounded for those who are going to put on pounds of weight because of excessive eating and drinking. Is that the joy we are yearning for?

After the Christmas season the doctors will be very busy due to our way of life during the Christmas festivities. Is that what the Messiah expects from us when He comes? He wants us to obey His commandments and do what is right. He told His disciples, "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete," (Jn. 15:10-11). Nothing will bring us complete joy other than the joy of Christ.

St. Ignatius of Loyola found lasting joy in reading about the life of Christ and the saints rather than reading secular books. Sex and drugs, food and drink, even human beings cannot bring us lasting joy and happiness. It is the one who baptizes with water and the Holy Spirit who can bring us lasting joy. Our world now is addicted to 'instant things' so much so that it is difficult to talk about waiting to experience the happiness that Christ will bring.

It is time for us to pray for the grace of God to be able to be patient and wait for the Lord as the farmer waits for the rains. "The end of all things is near, so keep your minds calm and sober for prayer," (1Pet. 4:7).