

Beloved we celebrate the Fourth and Last Sunday of Advent. At this climax of our Advent Season, our readings lead us to recount Mary's special role in salvation. Our Gospel passage ([Lk 1:39-45](#)) proclaims: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." God is about to become one of us; he is about to enter into our physical world through the "gate" or "vessel" of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is something, which will not just change the life of the Blessed Virgin forever, but something that will dramatically change the face of the human race forever. Things will never be the same again. Yes! The time of the fulfillment is at hand. The redemption of the human race is at hand.

Notice how this fulfillment plays out. Prophet Micah, inspired by the Holy Spirit declares in our First Reading ([Mic 5:1-4](#)), "Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne". We remained in gloom and suspense until the "chosen woman" gave birth to the Messiah. Can you see the significance of Mary here? Some people don't understand the mystery, they simply contend, "God used Mary and there's nothing more to it. Not at all! I have this simple message for such people, "God does not use and dump". God, in making his choice of this woman "zoomed" into our world of many peoples and continents, nations, regions, tribes and languages, "zoomed" into the Middle East and from all the countries there, he chose only Israel and from Israel he chose the tribe of Judah. "You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel". And guess the woman he chose... Mary! Beloved, this is not an accidental choice; it is God's design and must be acclaimed.

The exclusively human connection of God 'breaking into our space and time' is Mary. The choice of Mary as "the gate" or "vessel" for this epic event of God becoming man is an extraordinary eternal event. Hence, the Church honors Mary with many excellent titles in her litanies: "House of Gold", "Ark of the Covenant", and "Gate of Heaven", among others. One very great contemporary title unknown in previous generations was, as I believe it, given by God from the lips of a little five year old girl. She and her family live in Ocala. They visited me last week. We fixed a dinner in the rectory and had a very nice time. As they were leaving, about to enter into their car, the little girl gazed at our Marian Grotto in the distance (shining brightly as it's always illuminated at night) and exclaimed, 'Fr Emmanuel, look at that giant candle!!!!!!' I wondered what she was speaking about. All of us gazed at the distant image she was pointing at; her parents didn't know what to make of it. And I laughed and replied, "No! It's the Marian Grotto, with light shining upon it". Then it struck me. We've just discovered a new title for Mary, especially in the context of Advent

and Christmas. She is truly the "Giant Candle" and Jesus is the "Giant Light" she carried in her womb and bore at Christmas. After all, St John, speaking of Jesus, writes "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world" (John 1:9). Indeed, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise?" (Matt 21:16).

The Advent of Jesus into our world through the intermediary of Mary, as willed by God, has many lessons for us. Mary is the icon (representation) of the Church. From her role, we see the role God wills for the members of the Church. Just as Mary conceived the Word made flesh in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too must be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, conceive Jesus in our hearts and minds and give birth to Jesus in our day-to-day lives of love, holiness, kindness, gentleness, meekness, humility, obedience and the fear of God. Just as Mary is the "Giant Candle" giving the "Giant Light" of Jesus to the World, we too are called to be instruments of evangelization so that the light of Jesus will shine brighter than any contrary 'lights' in our world and dispel sin and ignorance.

Advent season anticipates Christmas, a time of giving and sharing. God shared with us his ever-abiding presence. His Only Begotten Son becomes "Our brother", "Emmanuel (God-with-us)". He used Mary to teach us that we too can share; how to share and what to share, especially during Advent and Christmas. Mary visited and helped Elizabeth during her pregnancy; just as we need to reach out to all in need and lend a helping hand. But Mary's significant gift was the bringing of Jesus into the home of Elizabeth and Zachariah. Accordingly, let our Christmas not be reduced to merely wrapping up packages and the exchange of Christmas cards. Let it be the sharing of Jesus with our relatives and neighbors. Jesus is constantly reminding us, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Finally, today is the climatic liturgical moment of Advent Season 2009. St Padre Pio says, "Closer to Mary is closer to Jesus". Without having Mary, the "Giant Candle", in your life, how can you possibly have Jesus "the Giant Light"? Invite the pregnant Mother into your home. Elizabeth declared, "And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Recognize how privileged you are too and declare like Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb". Offer to Mary the stable of your heart of humility and meekness that she may give birth to Jesus there. May she obtain for us the graces of family wholeness this Christmas through Christ our Lord, Amen.