

Homily 4th Sunday of Advent A

Today's Advent message is about *Absolute Trust in God; Following God on His Terms*: "The Lord himself will give you this sign. The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel". This is our Advent Sign of signs. It is God taking the initiative to grant us salvation. Jim Reeves rendered a masterpiece, "It is no secret what God can do...." Certainly, God loves us and we know it. He cares about us, protects us and sustains us. It is no secret! In fact, God can "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20; RSV). Why then do many Christians, even Catholics, sometimes approach God as if they do not yet trust Him?

Our First Reading (Isa 7:10-14) portrays that situation where the people of Israel were frequently demanding signs: "Lord, do this or that for us that we may know that you love us, care for us, protect us, etc. Against this background, Ahaz's faith and trust were tested. Will he be different? "The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!" He responded, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!" How hypocritical! He would have scored an A+ if his response had been with a pure motive. Take a cue from Christ's temptation? The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (Matt 4:6). Jesus responded, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matt 4:7). Jesus knew who he is. Why ask God to prove it? Nevertheless, the problem was that Ahaz did not place his trust in God; he trusted in man (the King of Assyria) to save him from his aggressors (cf. 2Kgs 16:7-9).

Ahaz did not resign to God's will; he did not follow God on God's terms. He trusted in man under the pretext of not "putting God to the test." He was even more terrible than those who readily demand for signs and signs. Consequently, the First Reading decries his deceit as well as the Israelites' incessant quest for signs: "Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary people, must you also weary my God?" Beloved, consider why this was actually "wearying God". Simply take an inventory of the indisputable signs and wonders God did in Egypt. Were they not enough to generate an unconditional trust in God? Also, during their desert wanderings, God gave them water from the rock. He gave them manna from the sky. What more signs must be done for God to earn their trust?

Our Gospel passage (Mt 1:18-24) confirms how God fulfilled his promise of giving us NOT the "fleeting" signs we ask for but the "proper and lasting" sign that will transform our relationship with God forever: "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'*". Indeed, as stated above, God can "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). God "has blessed us

in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). Is that not more than enough? Let us then demonstrate in the words of St. Paul in our Second Reading (Rom 1:1-7), “the obedience of faith”.

However, Pope John Paul II says, “Grace offered is different from grace received”. See how Joseph almost missed out. He almost divorced “Mary pregnant with Jesus”, the sign of God’s favor. Certainly, Mary must have tried to explain but to no avail. Joseph just could not understand it. Do not blame him at all. How many men would have conceded to such an astonishing event? Thanks to the timely intervention by the archangel: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” And “When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.” Unfortunately, many Christians ‘divorce’ Mary completely from their faith life; they do not want to have anything to do with her. Beloved, please, welcome Mary and Jesus into your home this Christmas and always. Learn from Elizabeth who, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared, “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43).

Many Christians also “divorce” the Mysteries of Faith for other interests. Christ does not want us to abandon the real thing and weary him with demands for ‘unnecessary signs’. He says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt 12:39; 16:4). Here, Christ insists that we focus on the “sign of redemption”, not on mere “transitory signs”. What sign do I look for when I come to Church? Is it the “sign of entertainment” or the “sign of worship of God in Spirit and in truth”? Is it the “sign of fun, jokes and laughter” or the “sign of reverence, inner peace and healing”? Learn from the Blessed Mother how to treasure the mysteries of faith: “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51). St. Paul reiterates this point: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but **we preach Christ crucified**” (1Cor 1:22-23). Is preaching the crucified Christ an amusement? Yet, Christians complain, saying, “Ah, this priest or that priest is not funny enough.” Let us never become bored about the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, to the Jews flocking after Jesus solely for “physical bread for physical satisfaction”, Jesus says, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you” (John 6:27). What was the result? St. John says, “After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (John 6:66). This is happening all over today. People abandon the church where the “mysteries of faith” are proclaimed in pursuit of places they are “entertained”. What a loss of our authentic Christian orientation! This final Sunday of Advent, may God renew our dedication to seek genuinely revealed Christian values, to trust Him and follow Him on his terms through Christ our Lord, Amen.