

# Advent Newsletter 2015



Dec 20, 2015 - Fourth Sunday of Advent

## Adult faith is a courageous stance toward life

We live in a time when many of our adult children do not give much attention to the spiritual side of their life. This is an opportunity to relearn what it means to believe as an adult. Sincere belief does not come cheaply.



On the fourth Sunday of Advent we are given the story of Mary. She stands as the model of faith and trust in God.

This is where we need to discover

what it meant for this young person to believe and walk with God.

Do not confuse religious faith with having your baby 'baptized' by a priest. This is not faith but is meant to be an expression, a sincere commitment, to living a life of faith like Mary. What we do in the sacramental celebration is give expression to the deep reality that God is bringing about in our lives.

You will never come to an adult faith without struggle. We need to work through the failures, the doubts and seasons of confusions before we actually do walk by faith.

In this bulletin we want to be challenged by Mary. We do not want to take it for granted that she

believed! How wonderful and then just leave it like that! Our people are not comfortable when they are challenged from within the parish community but examining the faith of Mary will push everyone to look at their own practice of the faith.

## Will the real Mary stand up?



The real Mary was a young person of about fourteen or fifteen years of age. She had come of marriageable age. In that world it was important that you married young by our

standards, had your children and had them raised before you would die in your early forties. The window of raising your children was very limited.

Mary is a person without power. She was illiterate, a working woman from the outback of civilization. It is in this poverty and littleness that God bursts into humanity.

# Three crucial moments

Why is Mary so important to our life of faith in 2015?

This is no retelling a precious story from our history. We must hear the story of Mary and apply it to our own lives. We also are confronted by God with doing the impossible.

## First God sent the angel (messenger)



As we are reading the story of Mary (Lk. 1,26-37) we are struck that this all happened in such ordinary surroundings, most probably, her own house. The angel (all unexpected bursts in) comes to Mary in the town of Nazareth. This begins from God's side. In no way is Mary seeking this mission. The first crucial moment is this unplanned breaking in of God into Mary's life. Very often God will break into our lives in ways that we could never have foreseen. It may be the goodness of the unexpected stranger who discovered your wandering father in his dementia, located where he belonged and returned to your mother after hours of worrying. This might be a touch of God's grace. Reflect on the surprises that God

has thrown into your life.

## God asks the impossible



We take the request of God too lightly. God asks Mary to do the impossible: become mother! This would ruin her chances of marriage and respect within her clan. This is not some light request but God comes asking this young person, without power, to do the impossible. Mary immediately responds: How can this be since I am a virgin? Put yourself in Mary's shoes and feel her fear and trepidation. When in your life have you been asked to take on a new position in life, something that you considered beyond your capabilities? Where have you been asked by God to venture forth like walking on a frozen pond no knowing how deep the ice actually is?

## Living in the power of God



The third crucial moment in the faith of Mary is to be confronted with "nothing is impossible with God." It certainly does not make rational sense. She meets the power of God. She recognized how God is working in the life of her cousin Elizabeth. God is accomplishing God's plans for humanity. This is how Mary accepts, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord." Now where in life have you walked with God in such a trusting fashion? Has there been times when you could not see the light at the end of the tunnel, but you were able to trust that God would work things out? When did you hear from God: Nothing is impossible with God?



## **An adult faith is always an act of courage**

It is too easy to assume that we believe. Often it is a cover-up for cheap living. No one will know

what it really means to believe until they have been tested. We may say that we believe in God and that God is always a God of goodness but when we are

confronted by the terrible crimes toward innocent people we begin to question how God could be good. Our faith is only adult when we have worked through these struggles with the goodness of God and the terrible sinfulness of humanity and we come out more firmly convinced than ever that at the center of all the universe, the center of all our lives, is the good God. Think back in your own life when you were put to the test. Did you collapse and give up on God? Or did you struggle to find deeper meaning in the goodness of God?

## **Mary has much to teach us**



When we focus on the young woman, Mary, this Advent Sunday we are being challenged to grow in our faith life. Mary stands with all the people who do not have power and are not recognized as important in this world. This woman did not have unlimited resources to protect herself against the plans of God. She was being brought into a much greater scheme of things. This was part of the unfolding of God's plan for salvation (true liberation) of the human race. This young woman could have said no. She could have walked away from the request of God. Fear could have crippled her life. But she did not: she trusted and she believed!

## **Walk the mile in Mary's shoes**



The story of Mary is not just the story of our hero in the faith. Each believer must stand in the shoes of Mary. There are and will be moments that God will break into our lives in the most unexpected way. We are very fearful and hesitant. We struggle with trusting that God will work all things for the better.

Perhaps there has been a terrible rift between yourself and your sister. There were some very angry and hurtful words in the past and neither of you are willing to let go of the hurt. In fact, you both keep nursing the embers of resentment by adding a little more

fuel (i.e., anger) on the pain and suffering.

Now, God comes to you and is asking you to let go of the anger and all the hurts. Give all the pain to God and believe that there will be healing.

This is where the faith of Mary all makes sense. She believed that God could accomplish the impossible. Now, you are challenged to believe that God will work the impossible out by bringing you and your sister to greater healing.



## **Your will be done!**

An adult faith is always a tried faith. It does not come cheaply. It comes through struggle and searching to find the will of God.



## Religion leads us to living and working with God



It is always so sad when people think that the mere fact that their mother hauled them off of the parish church, had the waters poured on their little foreheads and now consider that they are believers.

Maybe nothing more was done than a religious gesture that went nowhere!

A mature faith is one that leads us to the very life and heart of God. It is all about hearing the call of God, saying yes with our lives and walking in trust with our God. Always think of it like the parent who grabs the hand of the little one on a dark night, walks that child home, and all the while, the child trusts that all is going to be alright. The

child must walk in faith and trust.

Maybe you are struggling with trusting in God because your forty three old husband has cancer, you have just been downsized by the corporation that you work for and your sixteen year old wants to run away from home! Where is the good God in all of this?

Mary, the little one, the powerless one, walked with her hand firmly in God's hand. There must have been moments of serious doubt and confusion but she trusted and she walked with God.

## No pain, no gain

It seems glib to say that real growth and maturity only happen as we struggle and wrestle with Jesus Christ. Christ has promised to always be with us. On this fourth Advent Sunday pray to stick with Christ, in the warm days of December and through the beastly storms of January.

## Why we love Mary!

This little one is one we can identify with and understand.



If someone tells you their life story but it seems way beyond your comprehension you soon turn away. But if it is one of your own people that you went to school with and they start telling you about their struggles you will listen. You can identify with them. This is the reason we have found Mary to be so helpful to our life. She is not a person of exceptional talent, wealth and strength. She is one of us. A working young person who responds to God in her littleness. We can walk with her when God comes to ask of us what appears to be the impossible and very difficult in life.

## What to pray for on this Fourth Sunday?

Pray with courage. Pray to be able to trust when God comes to ask the almost impossible of your life. Pray to be "the servant of the Lord" when we cannot understand or are very confused. Seek to pray while standing in the shoes of Mary.