

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Fourth Sunday of Advent—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year B)

(All readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary of the Catholic Church.
The Lectionary readings for the United States are taken from the New American Bible.)

Reading 1

2 Sm. 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

When King David was settled in his palace,
and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side,
he said to Nathan the prophet,
"Here I am living in a house of cedar,
while the ark of God dwells in a tent!"
Nathan answered the king,
"Go, do whatever you have in mind,
for the LORD is with you."
But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said:
"Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD:
Should you build me a house to dwell in?'"

"It was I who took you from the pasture
and from the care of the flock
to be commander of my people Israel.
I have been with you wherever you went,
and I have destroyed all your enemies before you.
And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth.
I will fix a place for my people Israel;
I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place
without further disturbance.
Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old,
since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel.
I will give you rest from all your enemies.
The LORD also reveals to you
that he will establish a house for you.
And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors,
I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins,
and I will make his kingdom firm.
I will be a father to him,
and he shall be a son to me.
Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me;
your throne shall stand firm forever."

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

R. (2a) **For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever;
through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness.
For you have said, "My kindness is established forever";
in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

R. **Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant:
Forever will I confirm your posterity
and establish your throne for all generations."

R. **Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

"He shall say of me, 'You are my father,
my God, the Rock, my savior.'
Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him,
and my covenant with him stands firm."

R. **Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

Reading 2

Rom 16:25-27

Brothers and sisters:

To him who can strengthen you,
according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,
according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages
but now manifested through the prophetic writings and,
according to the command of the eternal God,
made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith,
to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ
be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia

Lk 1:38

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Lk 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,
of the house of David,
and the virgin's name was Mary.
And coming to her, he said,
"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."
But she was greatly troubled at what was said
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
Then the angel said to her,
"Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus.
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,
and of his kingdom there will be no end."
But Mary said to the angel,
"How can this be,
since I have no relations with a man?"
And the angel said to her in reply,
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
Therefore the child to be born
will be called holy, the Son of God.
And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,
has also conceived a son in her old age,
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;
for nothing will be impossible for God."
Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word."
Then the angel departed from her.

Exegesis:

2 Sm. 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

The setting of our first reading today is the transfer of power and leadership from Saul to King David. This transition takes place approximately 7 centuries before Christ. King David is transporting the Ark of God to its new location, Jerusalem. The eternal plan of God from the beginning of creation, to send His only Son into our world, the promise of the Messiah, is revealed in God's covenant with King David. The tent, the tabernacle, signifies God's presence on the journey with His people. There is a nomadic nature to it. The house, a place of dwelling, has more of a permanent character to it. God promises that David's kingdom will endure forever.

Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

The covenant of God with King David is celebrated in Psalm 89. Like our reading from 2 Samuel the psalmist is unveiling the promise of the Messiah from the line of David. Themes of the goodness, mercy, and fidelity of God permeate this psalm. God as father is proclaimed. The faithfulness of God, the steadfastness, the permanence of His covenant shines forth. "My God, the rock of my salvation." The image of God as Rock appears numerous times throughout sacred scripture. It portrays the immutability of God.

Rom 16:25-27

You may have noticed that our reading from St. Paul today consists of one sentence. Paul speaks of the revelation of the mystery of the eternal God through Christ, Jesus. I suspect that this pericope was chosen to further portray the image of the immutable God and the necessity of our response in faith.

Lk 1:26-38

The specifics of God's intervention in human history are striking. God sends the Angel Gabriel to a particular person, at a certain time, in a designated place. The person is a young virgin, Mary, betrothed to a particular man, Joseph, of a certain lineage, the house of David. This is a testimony to the personal nature of God and the necessity of our personal response. The fulfillment of the messianic promise from the creation of time, revealed in King David, is now unveiled.

God's grace and our human response is manifest in Mary. The Holy Spirit entering into, and overshadowing Mary will only materialize with her acquiescence and cooperation. Mary bears God in her mind and heart before she carries Him in her womb. Through Mary eternity enters into our world. God takes on flesh in Mary and will make His dwelling among us.

Reflection:

One day in the seminary I was sitting in Fr. Robert Barron's' (Now Bishop Barron) theology class. We were having our usual lively discussion about some fine point of theology. Fr. Barron was looking a little concerned about the direction of our discussion and said, "Time out gentlemen (making the T with his hands), Jesus is not some divine contingency plan." He went on to explain that from the beginning of creation God knew that He was going to send His only Son into our world to reveal Himself to us, communicate His love to us, and to save us from our sins. God does not make mistakes. God did not get it wrong the first time and then send His Son to correct His mistake. From the beginning of time, just as a parent knows his/her child will make mistakes, God knew that because love must be free that we would abuse that freedom and fall. God chose from the beginning of time to give Himself to us in total self-giving love. Jesus is part of His plan of creation. This is who God is.

Our readings today reflect that plan of God from the beginning of time. At its deepest level our scripture is about eternity entering into time. The God of creation is with His people. Our God is not some deity who created everything from nothing and then stepped back to watch from some distant heaven. God is with His people, in covenant relationship with us. He is with us on the journey. He chooses to enter into time and space.

The messianic plan from all of creation is revealed to us in our readings. God chooses to enter our world in very specific times, and places and people. God enters a deep covenant relationship with David. God reveals His plan to send His Only Son into our world through the lineage of King David. God sends the angel Gabriel, to a virgin in the town of Nazareth in Galilee, a very specific person and place. At a very specific time the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, and she will give birth to the Godman, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Eternity steps into time.

In his first letter to the world, *Deus Caritas Est, God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that God is with us now in a new way: "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood."(P.13) In times past God was with His people in a variety of ways, in covenant relationship with them, on the journey with them, in the Ark of the Covenant, in the Rock of Horeb, speaking through the Law and the Prophets. Now God is Emmanuel. Now God is with us in that God is in us. At the Last Supper Jesus spoke of this indwelling abiding presence.

It was a spiritual awakening for me when I came to see the incarnation as more than a static historical event. I now see the incarnation as a living reality. Eternity desires to live and move in time in and through us. God wants to love in and through us, His beloved. And so, pray with me, Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.



Personal Witness:

One of the first books that we were required to read in the seminary was *The Confessions* of St. Augustine. The book, sometimes referred to as an autobiography, is really a prayer, as the great saint is talking to God and revealing his innermost self. In the first paragraph of that prayer, we find the famous, most often quoted, line of Augustine, “You created us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” I immediately fell in love with the writings of the great saint. His words were articulating the deep restlessness of my own heart. It was as if he were revealing to me the deepest longings of my soul. I will always remember that as a great moment of self-discovery.

A lot has been said about this deep longing for God, sometimes referred to as the natural desire for God. In nature it may be likened to the inexorable drive of a salmon to return to the place of its birth. Do we seek to return to our origin, i.e. God? Is it a yearning for happiness? Is it a desire for life itself, for love, for joy, for peace? Augustine points out that we must have once known this state of being, this thing that we yearn for, if we desire to return to it.

God is love. God is absolute self-giving love. God reveals to us that He created us in His own image and likeness. All of God’s creation seems to strive to fulfill the purpose for which it was created. Our natural desire must then be self-giving love. We seem to find the greatest fulfillment in dying to self, in giving ourselves to a cause bigger than us. As Jesus was about to face His Passion and death, He said, “I tell you these things so that My joy might be in you and your joy be complete.” Jesus saw the fulfillment of His purpose in facing His own passion and death. From the Cross he exclaimed, “It is finished”, meaning it is accomplished or fulfilled.

As I have reflected on this natural desire of the human heart over the years, I have come to believe that it manifests itself in a variety of ways. It is as infinite as God is infinite. Perhaps that is it. We came from this state of infinity, a state outside of time and space, a state of permanence and immutability. We are living in a world in constant flux and chaos, and we can sense that we were made for something more. It is the yearning for eternity, eternal life from which we came.

When Jesus talked about peace, shalom, a peace that only He can give, I believe that He was promising this gift. It is not freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm. With His indwelling presence we are connected to the rock that is Christ. He is the rock of our salvation, the anchor in the storms of this life. When St. Augustine talked about the natural desire for God later in one of his sermons, he said that it was Jesus, Himself, abiding in the depth of our soul that is drawing us to oneness with His Father. Jesus is therefore both the desire within us and the object of that desire. Love seeks union. God is love. He created us for Himself and so our hearts are restless until they rest in Him, now and forever. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. There is no other!

