

Sunday December 20, 2020

Fourth Week of Advent Reflection *New Beginings*

By: Sandra Fortini

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid”

And so it begins.

This Sunday, with the story of the Annunciation, our relationship with Christ begins. Without this story there would be no Christmas, there would be no Easter. With the ‘yes’ of a teenage girl, our salvation is made possible, and by her consent, the greatest demonstration of love is set into motion. This is reason to rejoice! It is the beginning of our intimate relationship with God. A relationship in which God shares our humanity so that we can share in his divinity. Mary brings God to us and gives us *Emmanuel*. (God with us)

The Angel Gabriel’s message, with all it holds; uncertainty and faith, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, and a trusting love of God, is a story for all of us whoever we are and wherever we find ourselves at this time . We like Mary are given the choice to welcome or dismiss the Christ child in our own lives. To be open to God’s will in our lives and God’s action in the world and like Mary to trust in his plan. We are given a chance to begin again. Do not be afraid.

And so it begins.

But after 10 months of pandemic we are longing for an end. An end to months of limitations and isolation, an end to restrictions and frustrations, an end to hardships, hopelessness and uncertainty. This fourth week of Advent may feel like anything but a beginning.

This week is Christmas and we will not gather together for the celebration of the Mass to share in Eucharist because of the safety concerns we are faced with. But this Christmas we are truly a universal church. We are *Catholic*, we are one with, and share the reality of millions of Catholics around the world who cannot receive Eucharist because of war, persecution and the threat of this pandemic. We are one with the many Catholics in Long Term Care Facilities, Retirement Homes, Hospitals and Prisons, who do not receive communion on Christmas because they are the people who are routinely marginalized and overlooked.

When this time passes, and restrictions are lifted, will we remember our own experience of isolation and respond to the isolated and shut in of our own community? Or will we once again take for granted and fail to take the opportunity to visit a family

member or loved one, or to attend Sunday Mass? Will we forget the reality of this last year, and our collective experience.

We are given a chance to begin again.

Do not be afraid.

And so it begins.

In the readings of this fourth Sunday of Advent the Lord promises David that from his descendants will come a kingdom that endures forever. The royal line of David is established for the Lord. Our psalmist gives a prayer of praise to the Lord for his steadfast love and faithfulness to this covenant, and Paul in the second reading gives a glorious hymn of praise to God for the wonderful things he has given and the promise he has kept. Each reading directs our attention to Jesus.

How have we turned our eyes, our minds and our hearts to Jesus during this season of preparation? The Gospel reading invites us to consider how our preparations for Christmas have made us more aware of God's grace working in our lives. Mary, our greatest model of faith, an ordinary human being who allowed herself to be filled with the Holy Spirit was open to God's will. In her perfect love for her son, Mary too turns our eyes, our minds and our hearts to Jesus and shows us how to love him.

Even now in the fourth week we are given a chance to begin again.

Do not be afraid.

And so it begins.

The story of the Annunciation is a story of faith and love.

A love that transforms us and must be shared.

Like Mary, may we have the courage to accept the will of God and respond with an open heart.

We will not be afraid for God is with us.

