

Advent IV – Year B – Sermon

"For with God nothing will be impossible," declared the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation to Mary. And Mary Said, *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* These words remind us of the eternal truth that with God everything is possible and if we humble ourselves before his majesty and open hearts to his power, like Mary we will see and encounter the glory of God in our very lives.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we are brought before the events leading directly up to the Christmas celebration of Jesus' birth, through the account of the Annunciation to Mary. **Central in all of this is Mary's faith** – as her cousin Elizabeth will later remark: *"Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled"*. Unlike Zechariah in connection with the birth of John the Baptist, Mary does not simply have to believe that God will overcome barrenness and old age to bring about the promised new life; she has to believe that God's power will take the place of the male parent in a completely unparalleled way. "An absolute miracle, in the fullest sense of the word" – Miracles do happen and are possible with God.

Upon hearing the message of Gabriel concerning her own pregnancy and that of her cousin, Mary *"went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country"* to see Elizabeth. Why did she go with such speed and purpose? Even before she fully

realized or understood the message of the Angel? Because she had found her mission, her role in the story of God, the Theo-drama!

Today we are dominated by not so much the Theo-drama but the ego-drama in all its ramifications and implications. The ego-drama is the play that I am writing, I am producing, I am directing, and I am starring with the help of my I movies, I phones, I tunes, I pads and I pods, with money from Me Bank and insurance from Youi. It's all about me, myself and I. The culture is saturated with ego-drama and thus freedom of choice reigns supreme. I become the person that I choose to be.

However, on the other hand, the Theo-drama is the great story being directed and told by God. What makes life thrilling is to discover our role in His Story, which is the real History. This is what precisely happened to Mary. She has found her role – indeed a climactic role – in the Theo drama. And like Mary, we have to find our place in God's story. If like, Mary we believe in the message of the Angel, that nothing is impossible with God, and open our hearts to his glory, we will learn that we too could channel God's presence and power into the world.

God freely chose Mary to be the mother of his beloved Son. God's choice of Mary made her 'full of grace', If grace is God's gift, Mary was full of God's gifts. There is no point in asking what Mary did to deserve that: she didn't do

anything to deserve it, because it was a sheer gift. Nobody deserves gifts, nobody is entitled to favours. Gifts and favours reflect the generosity of the giver, not so much the worthiness of the receiver. The Gospel does not begin with what Mary does; it begins with what God does through Mary. When Mary is chosen to be the mother of God's Son, God's choice of her is not a reward for dedicated work or an answer to Mary's Prayer. Rather, God's choice of Mary is the result of God's freedom to choose Mary from among all women. When God chooses Mary, his choice makes her worthy. Because of this mysterious preference, all generations, as we today, call her blessed. For God graced Mary for a mission that was not for herself: her mission in the plan of God was to give Jesus Christ to every generation of the human family. Mary was asked to put her freedom, her whole person at the service of God's plan.

The difference between Mary and us is not that Mary was chosen while we are not; rather, it is that she fully responded to be chosen for her role while we at times remain hesitant and half-hearted about responding to what God asks of us. God has chosen all of us. Ephesians 1 says "God chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence."

Like Mary, we face God's choice of us; like her, we are challenged to say YES. If we could see ourselves as the result of God's choice rather than a cosmic accident, we might be keener to say a big YES. God has chosen each of us here today, he has a role for each of us, no matter how humble or majestic, he waits

for our choice that puts our freedom at his service, not so much for the ego-drama but for the Theo-drama.

So as we prepare to celebrate the absolute miracle of the incarnation, God coming to us as Man, let us ponder his mysterious election of Mary, the Saints, and each of us. We too could join with Mary in Rejoicing! Even at times we don't believe or feel that God favours us, or has chosen us, or that we are worth anything. So let these words of the angel be personalized to you as they were to Mary. "Rejoice, highly favoured, for I have chosen you to be holy and live through life in my presence. Yes, you! Rejoice.