

4th Sunday of Advent 2015

As we near the end of Advent and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus the Visitation story offers us several valuable lessons that we can take to heart ...Let's take a look at two of them....In today's Gospel the angel Gabriel had already appeared to Mary,...and one of the amazing things he told her was that her cousin Elizabeth - who was way beyond child-bearing age - was going to have a child. ...Mary must've been excited for Elizabeth...who up until then had not been able to bear children...even though she had prayed for many years, even decades.Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, had refused to believe it was possible even after the promise had been delivered to him by the angel Gabriel...Elizabeth was too old and barren, but that made no difference to God...It didn't stop the One for whom nothing is impossible. ...God took her barrenness and turned it into a blessing...He saw her emptiness, heard her prayers, and filled that emptiness with the gift of new life...a life that would become Jn the Bapt.

So, Lesson #1: DON'T GIVE UP ON GOD...When we've been praying for something for weeks,...months ...maybe years,..with no results, it's easy to give up on God and say, "It's too late. It just ain't gonna happen." ...But it may not be too late...Even the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years before God brought them to the Promised Land...Elizabeth and Zechariah had given up...the time had long passed.Yet, for God the time was just right to make it happen...You see, when we pray for something, there are three possible answers: ...YES, NO, or NOT YET...Of course, we would like an immediate YES, but I'll take a NOT YET over a definite NO...So 2 out of 3 of God's answers are good...Now, we usually take a NO answer as bad, but that's because we can't know the mind of God... We look at life as if we are peering through a keyhole and all we see is a tiny portion of a vast, ever changing scene...We can't see the big picture. Only God sees the whole landscape of life—past, present and future, with all its interlocking pieces. When God's answer to our prayer is NO, we have to trust that He knows that in the long run more good will come from NOT granting our request than if He did.

Several years ago, there was a story on the local TV news channel about a Rochester woman who had awakened after being in a coma for almost two years... As she and her family were leaving the hospital, a reporter asked the woman's mother, "For two years the doctors have been telling you there was no hope for your daughter...that she would never wake up...How did you resist the temptation to pull the plug and end all the suffering?" ...I can still see the big smile on that mother's face as she graciously answered that reporter's insensitive question, "We just kept on praying," she said... "Just kept waitin' on the Lord. We kept waitin' on the Lord....We never gave up on the Lord." ..

Now, as miraculous as it was for Elizabeth to conceive a child, God wasn't finished with her yet...Elizabeth would experience another supernatural jolt when Mary came to visit. The source of that jolt was the very Son of God Himself, ...conceived by the Holy Spirit and carried in Mary's womb...When Mary arrives at the home of her cousin, she greets Elizabeth,... and suddenly it's like a bolt of heavenly power shoots across the distance between her and Elizabeth,...and enters Elizabeth's body with such force that she is immediately filled with the Holy Spirit, and - in her own words - "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

At that moment, Elizabeth and her baby became intensely aware that the Messiah was present. ...The One God's people had been waiting on for centuries...was in their midst...Mary had carried Him into their home, and His presence had a profound effect on both Elizabeth and her child...Their lives would be changed forever. Mary, full of grace, was in a sense the Tabernacle carrying the Christ who would enter a world 2000 years ago that was in desperate need of a

healer and teacher and savior...Is today's world in any less desperate need of a healer and teacher and savior?...I don't think so.

Jesus, the healer, teacher and savior has long since returned to His heavenly throne...But before He left, He commissioned His disciples to go and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ into the whole world: "As the Father sent me, so I send you."...All of us who have been baptized in Christ share that same mission ...This is **Lesson #2**: Like Mary, and like those 1st disciples, we are called to carry Jesus into the world...to bring Him to people and places that need to know Jesus, the healer, teacher and savior in their lives.

Jesus doesn't send us on this mission unequipped...He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us and guide us and to remind us of all He has told us...And He has given us the gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist...He said "I am the living bread, come down from heaven." ...The host we receive at communion is not a thing...It is not a piece of bread...It is not a symbol...It is the real thing...the LIVING person of Jesus Christ...When I say AMEN as I receive the host, I'm saying that Jesus has become one with me...I am now carrying the living Christ within me.

Bishop Matano, in his pastoral letter on the Eucharist said that all that we do as Catholics stems from our belief in the Eucharist...How we live...the decisions we make...how we treat others after we walk out the church door...should reflect our belief that we have become bearers of Jesus Christ...We carry Him within us as we go back into the world...After Mass one day, I asked a wise priest what I should say when someone asks me why we have to come to Mass...He told me that the best answer you can give them is "*We come to Mass because Jesus is here, but He needs to be out there.*"...

Jesus needs to be out there...and we're the ones who've got to take Him there. We have to take the Christ that's within us to the people and places out there that need Him...

Jesus needs to be with the lonely, with those who are anxious or afraid, with those who are losing hope...**Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be with the aging, the sick, the dying...with all who need caring and comforting ... **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be with those who have lost their way and have gone down the wrong path... **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be with the poor, with all who are struggling and need helping hands and hearts... **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be with those who feel that their sins do not deserve God's mercy. **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be with those who feel that God has abandoned them... **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be everywhere that discrimination and prejudice keep people from being treated justly ... **Let's take Him there!**

Jesus needs to be wherever human life –from conception to natural death – is **NOT** respected and protected... **Let's take Him there!**

My friends, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior,...let our gift to the Christ child be a commitment to try and live these two lessons from the Visitation story:...Like Elizabeth, let's keep praying and never give up on God...Like Mary, let's bring the Christ within us into our

broken world...This promise – this birthday gift to Jesus - will be more precious to Him than all of the gold, frankincense and myrrh from all the wise men who ever lived... AMEN!

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