

## **HOMILY – FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT “C” 12-23-18**

This coming week we will be gathering again to celebrate liturgically the great feast of the birth of Christ. After much frantic activity and preparation, I presume that most of you are ready or close to ready. Most of the gifts have been bought and perhaps wrapped. The meals are ready to be prepared. The schedules have been verified with those with whom you will be gathering. Cards have been written and mailed. Phone calls have been made. Everything hopefully is in place, and all that is required now is to execute the plan.

After the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was with child, she too had plenty to do. To say that she had to address a number of loose ends would be a major understatement. She was going to have a baby, and with that announcement a whole new set of responsibilities had been placed on her plate. She had to find a way of telling Joseph the news, and she certainly worried about his response. She had to face the issue of her physical health as a pregnant mother. She had to plan for the coming of the child, where he would sleep, what he would wear, and how he would impact the normal functioning of the home. Like every new mother Mary was filled with new questions and responsibilities and new fears.

What makes today's Gospel so remarkable is that with all the issues Mary had to address, the last thing she needed was a hundred mile journey to some Judean town in the hill country. But that is exactly what Mary decided to do. She chose to go out and visit her cousin Elizabeth. Mary could have found all kinds of excuses from making the trip: "I should not travel if I am pregnant. This is not the best weather for a journey to the mountains. Elizabeth has her own family to support her and certainly she would understand if I stayed home." Many good excuses, but Mary chose to follow none of them. For Mary the primary thing was the people in her life. If her cousin was bearing new life, it was appropriate that the two should be together to celebrate that gift from God.

This story of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth gives us an example of how we might want to celebrate this Christmas season. This story reminds us of the importance of taking time to recognize and appreciate the people in our lives. It is a good lesson, especially at Christmas time. This Gospel reminds us that as we carry out the plans for our holiday celebrations we should not forget the people. With all the attention we give to gifts, and the food and traditions, it is easy to leave the people behind. We can become so preoccupied with the details of hospitality that we forget to recognize and spend time with the people we love. What a waste that would be. What a terrible distortion of the feast we celebrate. Because all the things we do, all the traditions we follow are for the sake of the people we love.

With all that she had to do, with all that was on her mind, Mary made the time to be with her cousin Elizabeth. Mary knew that nothing was more important than she and her cousin coming together to celebrate the new life that was growing within them. I hope

we will follow Mary's example. Even if it means that you will not be able to do everything you want, do not let your responsibilities detract from the precious time and the appreciation of the people who will be with you these coming days. Take time to listen to them, to speak to them, to laugh with them and perhaps to cry with them. People come first and without people there can be no true celebration of Christmas.

After all, this season is not primarily about gifts or food or traditions. This season is about the gift that God has given us in the people with whom we share our lives, in our connectedness to one another.

Story 12-23-18

I Corinthians 13, Christmas Version

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend myriad holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails.

Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust.

But giving the gift of love will endure.

Merry Christmas

Author Unknown