

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent

Today in our Scriptures, we hear some mighty stories. In our first reading, we hear about the great prophet, Micah, who foretold how the Messiah would come from that little town of Bethlehem – a name which literally means “House of Bread”. Then, in our second reading we hear the great words, “...we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” And finally in the Gospel, we hear St. Luke telling us the beautiful story of the Visitation – when the Blessed Virgin Mary went to visit her elderly relative, Elizabeth, who in her old age miraculously conceived John the Baptist.

We hear such true stories in the history of salvation. And we hear about people who have done amazing things for God – like the Prophets, the Blessed Mother and St. John the Baptist. We hear such things, and sometimes I think we say to ourselves – although perhaps not consciously – “But, I could never be like Mary.” Or, “I could never be like the Prophets”. And so, in a way, we may content ourselves with mediocrity – thinking, “God only works through those holy people in amazing ways, so I’ll just kind of sit back and see what happens.”

But you know what? All of us are called to be saints. Each one of us has the calling from God – or vocation – to a life holiness. And holiness is nothing other than growing in conformity to the will of God in all things, at all times, and in all places. In other words, the more we intentionally seek God in our life, the more like Him we become, and the more holy we are. But the thing is holiness looks different for everyone. Mary's place was to be the mother of the Savior, while Elizabeth's was to be the mother of his forerunner. And the prophets' was to announce that all this would truly take place.

Different from all these is one of my favorite saints, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. She was a French Carmelite nun, who died at the age of 24. And her personal autobiography, entitled *The Story of a Soul*, gives her personal witness of an extraordinary life of loving holiness. Thérèse's story is one filled with desires: she wanted to be a missionary, a soldier, a martyr, even a priest! And in the end, even though she became none of these, through the process of discovering what she was not, she found her calling – or vocation – in the Church. In her own words: "I knew that the Church had a heart and that such a heart appeared to be aflame with love. I knew that one love drove the members of the Church to action, that if this love were extinguished, the apostles would have proclaimed the Gospel no longer, the martyrs would have shed their blood no more. I saw and realized that love sets off the bounds of all vocations... Then, nearly ecstatic with the supreme joy in my

soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love. Certainly I have found my place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction.”

The point is, St. Thérèse discovered her place in the Body of Christ, but only because she first so loved the God who loved her first. Without loving God, my friends, we will not care that we have offended Him with our sins; we will not seek to fully obey the commands of His Church; and we will almost never seek His will and His calling in our lives. Loving God is everything. Ask God for the grace to passionately love Him more and more – to not be afraid to really love God.

As we draw closer to Christmas, and await the celebration of the birth of our Savior, we remember that Jesus really is the Almighty God in human flesh. And this God just isn't content with loving us from heaven; He has come to dwell among us. He has become one of us, so that we – gathered into His one Body – might truly become more like Him. He is calling us to be holy – to be open to being His saints, little by little, growing in faith, hope, and love. And so, may these final days of preparation help us to see, in a new light, the desire of God to dwell with each of us and come alive more fully in each of us for our own holiness and the salvation and sanctification of all. God bless you.