

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 4-B (Homily 02)

“Immense Hope and Obedient Faith”

(2 Samuel 7:1-5b, 8b-12. 14a, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 16:225-27; Luke 1:26-38)

Some years ago, under their former superior general, Fr. Richard Steckling, the worldwide congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate embarked on a renewal process entitled *Immense Hope*. Through a series of reflections, questions and exercises, they sought through this animation tool to instil in themselves greater hope for the future as they grappled with the challenges of the present. That document still surfaces as a source of inspiration for the Oblates to this day.

Today’s readings for this last Sunday of Advent are in themselves a source of inspiration and hope for us, calling us to an obedient faith that will realize that hope.

The first reading from the Book of Samuel contains within it one of the most profound and tantalizing prophecies to be found in the Old Testament.

In this reading King David is planning to build a dwelling for God that would be more fitting. Through the Prophet Nathan, however, God turns the tables on him.

First, God puts things into perspective for King David. He is reminded of all that God has done for him, to establish him as King of Israel. But that is not all. Far from David building a dwelling for God, it is God who will do much more for him.

God will grant him peace against his enemies, and will make him a house. Moreover, God will raise up a descendant for David from his lineage. Here we enter into the profound depths of Old Testament prophecy at its best, for those who have the eyes of faith to see. This descendant will be a Son to God and God will be a Father to him. Not just his house, but his kingdom will endure forever. How could so many generation of Jewish faithful, and people of all nations, miss this message?

Turning to the Gospel, we see that prophecy of Nathan millennium earlier, starting to be fulfilled, in a surprising and amazingly humble way, calling forth great faith. An angel of God appears to Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, of the House of David. So the House of David is involved. Mary would bear a son, who would be called Jesus. He will be the Son of the Most High. Again, the words of the

prophecy are being fulfilled: he would be a son to God, and God will be a father to him.

Not only that, this descendant of David will reign over the House of Jacob. Jacob was the name the forefather of David bore until he struggled with an angel of the Lord and was given the new name Israel. So the fulfillment of this prophecy stretches way back into the ancestry of David. Truly God is at work in a secret and mysterious way in the unfolding of these biblical events.

What is new in this scene is the Holy Spirit. It will be through the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary will conceive Jesus in her womb, and give birth to the Son of God. Her humble fiat, her obedient faith, is the key to the realization of this prophetic hope.

This is the mystery that causes St. Paul in the second reading to wax eloquently, almost to the point of babbling, about this great secret mystery involving Jesus Christ who is the glory and power of the living God. This great mystery centered on the Trinity, the first hint of the Trinity in the Gospels, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, leads Paul to the central implication of this mystery for us – immense hope realized by obedient faith.

To live in hope, as did Mary, we must pray for her obedient faith. It is through her fiat, her humble yes to God, flowing out of her radical, raw, profound, total trust in God and complete surrender to God's will for her, that this mystery was carried out and the hope of the prophets fulfilled.

Where is our faith? How strong is our faith? When trials come; difficulties abound, darkness threatens to overwhelm and the way forward seems complex and hopeless, are we tempted to give up or turn to distractions or even lose hope?

Or are we driven to our knees to acknowledge our own powerlessness and weakness, and rely totally on God's power to see us through, as did Mary? That is the invitation to us from this last Sunday of Advent.

According to Sr. Joan Chittister, in her book, *Scarred by the Struggle; Transformed by Hope*, "Hope is not grounded in the future. Hope is fulfilled in the future, but it is based on our ability to remember that we have survived everything in life to this point, and have emerged in even better form than when these troubles began - so why should it not be the same for this latest difficult situation too? Then we hope because we have no reason not to hope. Hope sits by the window waiting

for a new dawn even though there is not an ounce of proof in tonight's black, black sky that it could possibly come."

John, leader of a religious organization, felt down, sad, discouraged, almost overcome by all the challenges and problems facing him. He felt little energy to do anything, feared he was falling into a depression, and was concerned that his physical health might even break down. He decided to go on a retreat and prayed as he never had before for stronger faith, using the passage of Jesus calming the storm. That truly spoke to his situation, as he faced not just one storm but many storms.

As he prayed, he could almost feel his emotions healing, and faith growing stronger within him. A second time, he prayed with the readings for this Sunday, and found himself praying from the heart for obedient faith and hope, and again, he felt less stress, greater hope and stronger faith growing within him. He was even able to sit down and write out a homily based on what he was experiencing. He was actually living the readings, experiencing great hope through his obedient faith.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a tremendous act of faith. We believe that Jesus is present in his Word, which touches our hearts. And we believe that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present in communion, which touches even our bodies. And we are obedient to the commandment of Jesus to do this in memory of him.

In so doing, we can be filled with immense hope that our darkness and difficulties are manageable through the power of this Eucharist and the power of the Spirit of the only Son of God, always at work in the lives of those with the humble faith of Mary.

May our celebration today truly fill us with immense hope and obedient faith, and send us out to conquer our darkness and share this Good News with all we meet.

