Fourth Sunday of Advent

Promises are about to be fulfilled. That is the essence of Gabriel’s message to Mary. It is also God’s message to us through our scriptures and prayers today. When God makes a promise, God fulfills it.

God made a promise. Abraham trusted, and through a miraculous birth, Isaac was born. Abraham’s faith was tested, but he trusted, and God brought a people to birth.

God made promise. Moses trusted, and through the Exodus, God brought that people out of slavery. They were tested, and often failed. But God had established a covenant, and fulfilled his promise. God gave them a home.

God made a promise. David trusted, and despite his human weakness, on the foundation of his faith and love for God, a people became a nation.

God made a promise. Mary trusted, and we are about to celebrate God’s most miraculous intervention, taking on flesh, fulfilling the covenant through the paschal sacrifice, and establishing a kingdom not of worldly rulers, who rise and fall, but an eternal kingdom, ruled through love by the King of love, whose subjects find joy in sacrament, sacrifice and service in this life, and in eternal union with God in the next.

Promises were made. Challenges came. Faith was tested. Promises were fulfilled, and promises are fulfilled in us every time we can say from our heart “thy will be done.”

At the beginning of Advent we distributed these bookmarks, inviting you to write after each Mass in Advent the one thing that touched you in some special way. So what can I write on that bookmark for what spoke to me at this Mass? How have I heard God speaking to me through the Word?

I know I would do well to take to heart two things from the scriptures today, one from the Old Testament and one from the New.

David began as a humble shepherd. When he slew Goliath, he knew it was God’s doing, not his own power. As he achieved victories, took the throne and expanded the nation, he was still giving credit to God. But in the passage we heard today, there is a subtle shift.

Now he is focused on what he, a rich and powerful king, would like to do for God.

We don’t hear that the idea came from God. Nathan has to remind David: Always start with what God wants to do for you and through you. Your own ideas may be good. But God’s plan is greater. Yours is mostly for right now, as much your legacy as a house for God. God’s vision is about the future, a future that will last long after any temple is gone.

That is a lesson I can translate into my own life and take to heart. It just takes seeing beyond temples and dynasties.
Lord, help me let go of any big plans I may have for what I would like to do for you. A physical legacy isn’t the important thing, a legacy of faithfulness is. Let me remember that the starting point should always be what you have done for me, and what you want to do through me. As you have taught again this Advent, help me remember the virtue of silence and listening, so that all I do begins with your inspiration, and is fulfilled through your divine assistance.

The key point from the Gospel is hardly different. Mary was engaged. That means she and Joseph had a plan. Did that plan include having a family, continuing the line of David? Did they hope for few sons and daughters? We don’t know. But we do know that God sent word of a future they could never have imagined. Overwhelming as it was, with deep trust in God, Mary was able to let her human vision of the future go, to embrace the divine vision God had for her. Through that act of trust and faith, promises came to fulfillment for her and for the rest of the world! Would hardship come along with grace? Simeon will prophecy that a sword pierce would her heart. But she will also see her son rise in glory, and ascend to the Father.

Here is a grace to pray for! Openness to the possibility that my vision and God’s are likely different. The grace to let go, embrace God’s vision for me, and cooperate with God fulfilling promises through me. Lord, help me never forget that willingness to accept sacrifice and dying to self are always in the picture, but with faith and trust, your promises always come to fulfillment.

Lord, please give us all the grace to respond with Mary: “May it be done to me according to your word.”