

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle B

2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-11, 14-16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

As Sr. Joan Mitchell begins her reflection this week in Sunday by Sunday, she asks her readers two thought provoking questions:

What do I bring with me today that seems impossible to do?

What asks life and energy from me that I might not have to give?

Keep those in mind as we reflect on the scripture passages for next Sunday.

This week we digress liturgically again and view the Good News through the eyes of Luke. The story is a familiar one at this season as we read about the visitation of an angel, Gabriel, to a virgin named Mary who was betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David. Within the announcement of Gabriel is the news about the pregnancy of Mary's cousin, Elizabeth.

When a story is as familiar as this one, we risk missing all facets of the message. Our ears hear but our hearts no longer listen. Perhaps if we dissect the pieces of all three readings and reassemble them into a whole we can view the message in a new way and be fed again.

In the first reading from Samuel, we read about King David's desire to build for Yahweh an elegant palace in which to dwell. He first consults with the prophet, Nathan, and then receives his answer from the Lord. The answer is basically, "No, thank you." Yahweh reminds David of all the times He has been with his chosen one, of battles won, and fame and fortunes established. "I have been with you wherever you went." Amazingly to David, Yahweh is not interested in an elegant Temple but He is interested in the memory of His love and

faithfulness being housed in the memories of His people. In the telling of this story in 1Chronicles, David is told by God that the reason he is not to build a Temple is because he has been a warrior and has shed blood. His son, Solomon, will be allowed to build it. Maybe Yahweh wants David to think of Him next to him in time of battle and exile. We can only guess.

As we move on to the story of Mary, we see that God has chosen to house Himself, or as the Hebrew would say, to tabernacle Himself in the womb of a simple woman-child, whose situation would be far from praise-worthy. His presence would first be recognized by the seed of a shriveled womb in a woman (Elizabeth) well past her prime and seen as rejected by God through her years of childlessness. Strange dwellings indeed!

Then Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tells us in his very convoluted style that we are to give the glory to God because it is He who makes us strong. Perhaps Paul best states it in 2Corinthians 12:9 where we hear that God's grace is sufficient for us because His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Through the weakness of a shepherd-king His power was made perfect and could not be increased by a Temple. Through the humility and simplicity of a simple maiden His power would become incarnate. Through the tested faith of a post-menopausal woman His presence would be acknowledged. Through imperfect us His power will again reach perfection. It is okay if we find ourselves facing the holidays through feelings of grief, because His power will be made perfect through that weakness. It is okay if we find ourselves fighting bitterness over life's disappointments, because His power is made perfect through that weakness. It is okay if we fight back tears of loneliness in this season of joy, because His power will be made perfect in that weakness.

This is the Good News preached to all nations and all people. Thank God He did not wait for beautiful Temples before He tabernacled Himself within us! Today His power is made perfect in our weakness for His love and grace are sufficient.

Merry Christmas!