

HOMILY, FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT "B"

Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul

DECEMBER 17 - 18, 2011

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Have you noticed how inundated we are by news? In the last thirty years, we have shifted from two or three television stations that signed on in the morning, and signed off late at night with a prayer I might add, we rested.

The television rested. The news seemed to be at rest.

And now...well, news is always present. We are surrounded by it. Twenty-four hour a day news. Updates, newsflashes and instant communication from virtually any place on the face of the earth and even from outer space.

The challenge of the news is that most of it appears to be bad news. For some reason, the world of media news seems fixated on bad news. For me personally, this was brought home during the recent uprisings across Northern Africa. We were not just hearing about the military movements after the fact. We were, instead, a part of the war effort as it was unfolding.

The conflict was brought right into our homes. So is African genocide, murder, rape, unlimited violence and more "tell all" shows on television than one can count. Every time we go to the movies, having taken out a bank loan to pay for it, we are subjected to a fast clipping series of coming attractions that crush gun shooting, pounding, ear-splitting violence into a few minutes leaving us stunned. Personally, at that point, I am exhausted!

No wonder I fall asleep during the feature presentation!

Considering all this, it is little wonder that we employ the phrase "no news is good news". Our fear of more bad news can lead us to think that there is very little good news, and if there is any good news, it's probably not for us. Hence, the phrase: "no news is good news."

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Gospel of Luke features Good News. No, it's no trick. It's not phony, nor is it a false promise. We are called to receive Good News, and it is even role-modeled for us by Mary. One scripture scholar reflecting on this passage calls Mary the "model of expectation". And what is it that she is expecting? Good News. She doesn't know it is good news at first. In fact, after hearing the message of the angel, Mary is afraid because she doesn't understand how all this will come about. A very natural human reaction. The assurance of the angel, however, and the love of God for this woman who will play a unique role in the history of our salvation, leads Mary to a humble acceptance of God's plan.

What are we expecting this Advent season? Do we really want Good News, or do we just want to survive this hectic season still knowing our names and able to sit up and take nourishment? What keeps us from expecting God's Good News of His love for us and our redemption?

Chaotic journeys to the shopping Mall, spending money like crazy and daily increasing fatigue all lead us to the point of not wanting any more news at all, good or bad.

The story of the Annunciation in today's Gospel calls us to seek Good News, to desire it, to welcome it as Mary, even with her all too human fears, was able to receive the Good News. As God's Good News became flesh in Mary, so, too, we enflesh the Good News of God's limitless mercy and unconditional love thereby becoming ourselves Good News for all around us.

As disciples of Jesus, we live lives of hopeful and hope filled expectation.

By Baptism, we live lives that expect Good News. There are plenty of situations in life that can block that desire: friends who suffer from

illnesses, spouses who are victims of downsizing, parents who struggle to make the best decisions for their children, and the afflictions of loneliness, addiction and deep-seated anger. How can we expect Good News in the midst of these challenges?

Mary's willingness to hear God's message demonstrates the necessity of listening. The first step in expecting Good News is to open our hearts to hearing God's word. Prayer that begins with listening can, in turn, help us to express the frustrations as well as the hopes of our lives. God's Good News isn't just for people who are perpetually happy. God's Good News is for everyone under all conditions, and all conditions can become opportunities for God to assure us of His love just as the angel's message assured Mary.

This Gospel today leads us to the edge of Christmas. It sets the stage for the celebration of our redemption in Christ Jesus. The Good News that we receive in Christ does not necessarily come in the form of answers to all our questions. More importantly, the Good News comes to us in the form of God made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, Christ who walks with us, loves us, cries with us, eats and drinks with us, suffers with and for us and who constantly calls us to be good listeners in prayer. As we receive the Gospel of the Annunciation, we behold Mary becoming the Mother of our Savior not because she completely understood what was happening to her, but because she was willing to express her fear and find reassurance from God. It was her honesty, openness and the unconditional love of God for her that made Jesus like us in all things but sin.

Maybe the best gift we can receive and give to others this Christmas is the Good News of Christ's presence in our lives. As Christ became flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, we enflesh Christ in our words and deeds, our

Advent prayer, our simplicity, our humility and, most especially, in our love.

In the midst of Christmas pageants, Christmas parties, decorated houses and frenzied shopping expeditions, we have yet one more week of Advent, one more week to practice listening for Good News, desiring Good News, and leaning into Good News. Mary is our role model of expecting Good News. Could we have a better companion this week than the Mother of God? She will encourage us to speak our fears as she spoke of hers. She can show us how to listen. She can show us how to give birth to the Savior who longs to be with us.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

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(Year B)

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1999

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