

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2020

In just five short days, we will be celebrating the birth of our Savior. The story of His birth begins in the Gospel of Luke with this phrase: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth..."

Along with Michael and Raphael, Gabriel is one of the great archangels serving the throne of God. His name means, "God is mighty", and he is called upon to make it clear that God is about to perform a "mission impossible" in someone's life.

We first hear about him in the Old Testament book of the prophet Daniel. Daniel had just had a vision of a ram and a goat, and God sent Gabriel to interpret it for him. The horrifying vision foretold the rise of a great political power which would bring devastation to the world. The angel Gabriel told Daniel that eventually this great political power would be defeated but "not by human power". That is, the hand of God would work in a mighty way to save his people from the tyrant. Though it would seem impossible that Israel, a country which at the time was in exile, could defend itself against such a mighty power, Gabriel arrives on the scene to announce that all things are possible with God.

In today's gospel reading, Gabriel now appears to Mary to declare that God has chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah. She is startled, and cannot comprehend the meaning of the angel's greeting and message. As the angel reveals God's plan to her, it becomes evident that there's a problem. How can she become pregnant if she is a virgin? Gabriel explains to her that it will be by the power of the Holy Spirit that she will conceive. And so, the child will not be the son of a human father but of God Himself. Gabriel ends his message with these words: "...for nothing will be impossible for God." The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that God is about to do the impossible in her life.

The Scriptures are full of stories of those whom God chooses to do the impossible. In the first reading, God tells David that his dynasty will be without end. David had been a simple shepherd boy. Alone, David could never have expected to be anything more than that. Yet, once he is called and empowered by God, he becomes king of his people, and he is remembered forever because from his line Jesus, the Messiah was born. God did the impossible in the life of King David.

The twelve apostles chosen by Jesus to carry on his message were also simple fishermen, tax collectors and political idealists. By themselves they didn't amount to much. Yet God used them to spread the message of the gospel to all the nations. It wasn't because of a good business plan or effective marketing strategy that we still remember them two-thousand years later. It wasn't because they wrote great books or had any other great achievements. It was because of the work of the Holy Spirit who

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emboldened them to witness to Jesus' love even in the face of persecution and death. The message of Jesus has reached us here in this place so many centuries later because God did the impossible in the lives of twelve simple men who said "yes" and followed Jesus.

The same is true of so many saints down through the ages. They were young women like Perpetua, Felicity, Anastasia and Agnes who stood up to the forces of the Roman Empire and were martyred. They would inspire other women to stand up with them until, eventually, the whole Roman Empire was converted. They were people like Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe who did not allow Hitler's Fascist regime to break their spirit and lose their faith. Instead, they went boldly to the concentration camps, trusting completely in God. They were a light in that terrible darkness. All this happened simply because these saints, like Mary, believed that God was with them and that He would do great things through them. And God did not let them down.

God is great. It is the nature of God to work wonders. When we say "yes" to God, the impossible happens.

As we look in our own lives, what wonders do we want God to perform? Are there people in our lives struggling with addiction? Do we have children who have drifted away from the Church and no longer believe? Are we struggling in our marriages or other relationships? Has the economy placed a strain on our jobs? If we entrust all those cares to the Lord, we can expect him to do a miracle.

As a parish community, what do we want to achieve? Do we want to reach out to more young people? Do we want to bring back to Church those who have stopped coming? Do we want to make our worship more joyful? What is holding us back?

We are rational and practical people. But, too often, we settle for the merely possible when God wants to do the impossible. Sometimes we approach God with a false humility, thinking that it would be arrogant or unreasonable of us to ask too much of Him. But God loves us as His children and will spare nothing to bring us closer to Him. There is nothing that we could ever ask Him that would be impossible for Him to do. And, because we are His children and He loves us, there is nothing He will not want to do for us, as long as it is in keeping with His will. All things are possible with God.

We are here today because God did the impossible in the life of Mary. We are here today because God did the impossible by becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ. And God will do the impossible before our very eyes turning simple bread and wine into the very Body and Blood of Jesus to nourish and strengthen us. To unleash

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this mighty power of God, all Mary did was tell Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word". To witness the impossible in our lives all we have to do as we receive the bread of angels is tell Jesus, "Yes, let your will be done in me as you say."