

## Homily - Fourth Sunday of Advent

In these final days and hours before we celebrate our Christmas festivities, the Church directs our attention once again to the model of Our Lady, and her anticipation of Our Lord's arrival.

We all know that Mary is the perfect example of what it means to be a Christian, the ideal example of holiness.

But more than almost any other virtue, the quality that all of us need to learn from Our Lady is holy docility.

Let's reflect on her response to the archangel:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word."

Openness and obedience to the will of God is such a challenging virtue to acquire.

There are plenty of reasons as to why this is, of course.

The most important reason is that holy obedience runs directly counter to the sin that is most difficult for us to fight.

We love our independence, and that desire easily becomes twisted into the self-reliance of pride.

In the tradition of the Church and in Scripture itself, Mary is portrayed as the great nemesis of Satan.

Her obedience and trust in the will of God stands directly opposed to his rebellion and total rejection of the divine plan.

But in that trusting obedience, Mary is the one who is ultimately truly free: perfectly open to the plan foretold by the prophets, and chosen to become the new Ark of the Covenant through her divine Son's Incarnation.

As we conclude this Advent season, the Lord is inviting us to prepare our hearts to receive his presence as well, and the most important way in which that openness is cultivated is through this same quality, this same virtue of holy docility and trust.

The second reading we heard today is taken from the final verses of Saint Paul's letter to the Roman Church, and in those final words, he reminds his community that the Gospel was made known to us in order to bring about what he calls "the obedience of faith."

If we are going to live like Mary, if we are going to fully respond to the loving will of God and grow in the freedom and joy of real holiness, then it is absolutely necessary that we allow God to form us in this kind of obedience.

And we need to realize that the obedience of faith isn't a mindless, blind faith.

In fact, it's quite the opposite.

The more our faith grows, and the more we choose to trust in the Lord's plan, the more everything else in our lives will fall into its right order and make sense - if not in the present, then certainly in the grand scheme of our lives.

The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* reminds us,

"There is an urgent need to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating *every aspect* of human existence.

A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives.”

Mary’s response to the message of an angel is a model for what that faith can look like.

In the moment, she still had questions.

There were parts of the divine plan that didn’t yet make sense.

But she received the Lord’s invitation with a spirit of trust and hope, not focused on the challenges that would inevitably come, but on the beauty that would be brought into the world through her “yes”.

As we conclude this Advent season and enter only hours from now into the joy of the Christmas solemnities, resolve to listen for however the Lord will invite you to do the same.

In the middle of the activities of the coming days, make the space, the time, and the attention for prayer.

Offer a silent and willing heart to the Lord, and allow him to reveal his plan in whatever place and time he may desire.

This is the essence of holiness - living with faith that Christ will lead us to light and understanding, hope in his providence, and a love that will keep us always striving to take that next step toward our heavenly destiny.

Today, we pray with Mary, our Mother, and invite the Lord to form our hearts through this Blessed Sacrament, so that we may echo her words with our lives:

“May it be done to me according to your word.”