



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent (C)

December 19, 2021

True Love Means Sacrifice

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

God is often present in the little, hidden things of life. Take for example the small town of Bethlehem. This place barely appeared on the maps of the time. Yet in this dull town, overlooked by all, God wished to be born. God isn't into bling.

Look at the Vatican painting *Annunciation* by Gentile da Fabriano. A ray of light in the painting shines from the upper left window directly down onto Mary's womb. She carries in her the Light of the World, but it happened in a way unbeknownst to anyone. He is

the Light of the World, shining to catch our attention, but he does so in silence, humility, and intimacy.

There is a second aspect of the Incarnation to learn here. Christmas was about a real sacrifice. Mary and Jesus offered their very selves. Hebrews says it wasn't an animal or a wheat offering but Jesus' very body and blood. The same for Mary, as it was her life, her virginity, her very intimacy, that she was opening to God when she agreed to be the mother of the Lord. It's easy to be generous when it doesn't touch too close to home.

So, try not to look for glitz and externals this Christmas but for God's hidden presence. And imitate Jesus and Mary by giving of your very self. It's not about a fast, a donation, or extra prayers—as good as those Advent practices are. But all of this prepares us to give our very selves to him in trust through the hidden acts of love of every day. +

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Sunday Readings

Micah 5:1–4a

But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah /
least among the clans of Judah, /
From you shall come forth for me /
one who is to be ruler in Israel.

Hebrews 10:5–10

We have been consecrated through
the offering of the body of Jesus
Christ once for all.

Luke 1:39–45

[Elizabeth] cried out in a loud voice
and said, "Most blessed are you
among women, and blessed is the
fruit of your womb."

A Word from Pope Francis

[Jesus] did not wait until we were good before he loved us, but gave himself freely to us. May we not wait for our neighbors to be good before we do good to them, for the Church to be perfect before we love her, for others to respect us before we serve them.

Christmas Midnight Mass,
December 24, 2019



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What hidden acts of love can you offer during this upcoming Christmas?
- Are there ways you can point out to your children God's presence in the little things?

Let Us Kneel

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

We were all packed onto a busy East Harlem street corner when a Puerto Rican man rushed into traffic, catching the attention of all who were waiting to cross. When he reached the other side of a sea of trucks and cars, he knelt down right there in the street at the feet of an old woman pushing a grocery cart. Leaning on her cart, she stood over him and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, shoulders, and chest. Then, holding her crossed fingers up reverently, the man kissed them. He knelt for a blessing from his godmother in the street, a common gesture for children and young people in Latin American countries, but a grand expression for a grown man.

The part of the Good Friday service most people dread is the Universal Prayer. As we pray for everyone in ten different petitions, the deacon or cantor calls out, “Let us kneel....Let us stand.” It’s tedious and painful for some knees, and tiring to many, so some priests invite people to either remain standing or be seated. Maybe it’s because sinking to our knees is too awkward or strange. Some don’t like to kneel. I’ve visited churches where the kneelers have been removed. What might that mean? In prayer, kneeling is an act of adoration and supplication, but it’s also a sign of powerlessness and defeat; it can be seen as a way to show humility in a physical way.



A woman told me her mother used to make her kneel on uncooked rice as a form of punishment for backtalking, disobedience, or lying. A common sight in the oft-crowded Mexican sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the procession of pilgrims walking on their knees in penance for themselves or loved ones. Remember the horrific scenes of people positioned on their knees before ISIS executioners just moments before they met an untimely death? There’s a lot that can bring us to our knees—penance, prayer, punishment, and protest. Kneeling is a powerful statement. It took the publicized kneeling of a pro football player to get us to notice.

Many are offended by those who kneel during the national anthem. Why? Is it to admit that our nation has been brought to its knees by terrorism and a pandemic; by racism and police brutality; by Harvey, Irma, and Maria; by a killer in Las Vegas; by a broken immigration system; by bipartisan paralysis and self-serving politicians? Much has proven to be beyond our power and ability to change. We’ve been humbled and humiliated, and the icon of our powerlessness is represented by an NFL player kneeling on the field of play.

When you kneel in church next time, pray that America can rise above the hate. The rhetoric. The prejudice. Let us kneel. +

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*Lord, your Word gives me life,
joy, hope, and peace.
May your Word find a home
in me and inspire me to live a life
rooted in gospel values.*

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 20–25, 2021

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66

Friday, Advent Weekday:
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79

Saturday, Nativity of the Lord (Christmas):
Is 52:7–10 / Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14