

Homily – 4 Advent B – Trials and Tribulations

BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD; LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.

We are very familiar with these words which St. Luke puts upon the lips of our Blessed Lady. They express a beautiful prayer, a prayer full of faith and courage and generosity.

There are two facets to this prayer – the passive, and the active, the receiving and the giving.

The passive side is Mary's readiness to accept what God wants of her: **BE IT DONE UNTO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.**

The active side, the giving side, is Mary's assertion: **BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD.** It is her pledge of co-operation, her readiness to carry out the will of God.

The mood of Mary in this scene seems to be at first rather apprehensive, or uncertain. What will the future hold? Will she have the capacity to cope with what is asked of her? Is she worthy of such a responsibility?

Such fears are very understandable, very reasonable, and very human. After all, there are two features to God's plan as it will unfold for her.

She is to be entrusted with a daunting task – the birth and the care of God's Son in his humanity - a task that will call for great faith and trust in the power and the purposes of God.

And there will be much suffering as part and parcel of this responsibility. Will she have the strength to bear the pain? Will her faith be resilient enough in the times of anguish that will certainly come?

Mary's task involved suffering from its very outset.

There was the birth, taking place in difficult, impoverished circumstances.

There was the flight as refugees to a foreign country.

There was her witnessing of the many pressures and demands and threats made upon Jesus in the course of his public ministry.

There was her participation in his crucifixion and death as she stood at the foot of the Cross.

All these sufferings! – Physical, mental, emotional – even spiritual! Had God abandoned them as seemed to be the case?

For each of us God has a plan – a task, a responsibility of caring
If we are faithful to our duties, our task will also certainly involve pains and stress of all kinds.

Some heartache we may bring upon ourselves by mistakes that we make in our human frailty.

But much hurt will come quite undeserved, and often unexpected, out of the blue.

The Gospel calls upon us to bear our suffering bravely, positively.
The example of Mary is an encouragement to us.

We are to accept these trials as part and parcel of responding faithfully to the will of God.

We can make positive use of our tribulations by offering them as a prayer for others, for humanity.

This will be a participation in the sufferings of Jesus himself, and will unite us more closely to him.

What better time to do this than during the celebration of the Mass when we gather in Spirit at the foot of the Cross to participate in the self-sacrificing love of our Blessed Lord?

So let us pull ourselves together as best we can and turn trustingly to our Father in heaven in the words of Jesus: **THY WILL BE DONE.**

And let us ask our Blessed Lady to pray for us as we echo in our hearts her own brave and generous words: **BEHOLD THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.**