

'PRESENTS FROM GOD'

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT - HOMILY – 18 DECEMBER 2016

As we light the 4th Advent Candle we celebrate that Christmas is near.

HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS?

Christmas is **A TIME FOR CELEBRATING JESUS IN OUR MIDST.**

Christmas means Christ Mass, the Mass of Christ.

We celebrate next weekend the Christmas Masses for Jesus Christ.

It is also **A TIME FOR CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFTS TO US.**

Yet if we take the image of presents under the Christmas Tree,

We see some wrapped presents but don't open them up.

The person who gave them to us is present, yet we don't open the presents.

A Time of Insensitivity, Ingratitude, Selfishness by us.

And we do that to God at times.

**God gifts us with what would make an incredible difference to us,
If only we would lovingly accept it and open ourselves to it.**

We might partially unwrap a present and leave it near the tree and are not interested in it.

A Time of Insensitivity, Ingratitude, Disinterest by us.

And we do that to God at times.

If only we would lovingly accept God's gifts fully.

We open the present, say thanks, place it later in a cupboard and many days or months or years later discover it.

And we do that to God at times.

If only we would lovingly use the gifts that God has given us now.

We turn to today's Gospel - Matthew 1:18-24 - for inspiration.

The Biblical scholar Brendan Byrne wrote in his book, "Lifting the Burden" about today's passage.

He informs us that,

"It was custom at the time for women to be married at a very early age"

And that because of their youth, they *"remain a year or so longer in their own family home before moving to that of their husband. During this time, even though not living together, the couple were man and wife – not merely "engaged" in the modern sense."*

Married but before they lived together, Mary is,

"with child from the Holy Spirit". (Matthew 1:18)

Joseph knows he is not the father, but his concern is for Mary.

The Gospel continues,

"Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly".

Now God acts again, this time through an angel of the Lord appearing in a dream to Joseph and saying,

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*

We wonder at the courage of both Mary and Joseph in receiving Jesus lovingly.
Courage to listen to God’s will, despite whatever gossip, remarks and frowns might be around the town.

Courage to follow God’s call.

Courage to be “righteous”.

Courage to follow wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

Many chapters later, we see Jesus instructing the early community in Matthew Chapter 18. He speaks about the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to go searching for the one missing. The shepherd moved out of his comfort zone.

And we know this applies to every Christian community.

DO WE GOSSIP ABOUT THE LOST ONES, DO WE COMPLAIN ABOUT THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR THEM?

DO WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO MOVE OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND SEEK THE LOST OR LONELY OR OPPRESSED?

ARE WE RIGHTEOUS, JUST, LIVING A SINCERE AND INTIMATE LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

We have focussed on one of God’s presents this year- the gift of Mercy and celebrated the Year of Mercy.

DO WE ACCEPT THE GIFT OF GOD’S MERCY THIS CHRISTMAS?

To celebrate Christmas, we prepare with **four** weeks of Advent.

We wish to appreciate and value God’s gifts to us.

And through these gifts, to love God and neighbour more deeply.

Let us now pause and **identify God’s gifts to us.** (Pause)

Let us now pause and **identify how we have responded to those gifts from God.** (Pause)

Let us seek God’s forgiveness for those times we have sinned and not respected those gifts. (Pause)

LET US CELEBRATE AND OPEN GOD’S GIFTS TO US.

Fr Gerry Hefferan – ‘Presents from God’ – 18 December 2016

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/121816.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/2hHqt3P>]