

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Christmas is nearly upon us... in case you didn't get the memo. This Fourth Sunday in Advent reminds us how close we are to Christmas... but more to the point, *how close God is to us*.

The first reading from the prophet Micah speaks to us of the littleness of Bethlehem, yet how the ruler comes forth. In many places in the Old Testament, God reminds Israel that He chose her not because she was the greatest, but the least. Again, he chooses the smallest, this tiny clan of Bethlehem-Ephrathah, to be the place from which the King shall come. It is, of course, hearkening back to David's coming as King (which took place centuries before Micah), but also looking ahead to the new King, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who is to come. God does not disdain littleness, but chooses the smallest to show His greatest power.

In the Gospel, we hear of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth. There, the smallest – John the Baptist in utero – is the first to recognize and announce the coming of the Messiah. He leaps in his mother's womb, and she recognizes the presence of God. Isn't it amazing to think about? God doesn't disdain to come to us in little ways, in the tiny, in the seemingly insignificant!

And this young girl – probably about fourteen years old (that's an eighth or ninth grader!) – bears the very Presence of the Godhead, the second person of the Blessed Trinity in her womb. Mary's "yes" (contrary to the person who recently said she was part of the "Me Too" movement, Mary gave full consent to God, our God who REFUSES step on our free will) brought about the closeness of God – Emmanuel, God-with-us. She bore God's presence to Elizabeth and John (and countless others in that nine month period).

Mary still bears Christ's presence to us.

And Christ calls us to be bearers of His presence to others in the world.

Think about this: when we receive Holy Communion, Jesus is truly, physically, sacramentally present within us... each one of us receives a unique touch of love from God. Are we aware of this presence? If we really understood the incredible presence of God in us, how would that change the way we act? How would it change our conversations in the car on the way home? How would it affect the ways we treat (and think about) the other people around us?

Sometimes, we might not hold on to this thought because it seems untenable to us: Why would God choose to be this close to me? How could He possibly be so close? It seems... well, just wrong. Yet God demonstrates over and over again that He seeks after the smallest, the least worthy to be the instruments of His presence and designs. He chooses the weakest to show His strength. He longs to be close to us. He doesn't require our goodness. He doesn't require our holiness. He doesn't require our abilities or strength. All He requires is our "yes" our willingness. With that "yes," given, and given again, He will choose closeness and intimacy with us. He will make us good and holy. He will supplement our weakness with supernatural abilities, so that when people see the way God acts through us, they will say, "That has to be God, because that person couldn't possibly..."

Do we give God our "yes"? Do we let Him be close to us? He wants so much to show us His love. But if we continually choose other things over God, He won't force Himself on us.

Tuesday is Christmas, the birthday of the God-man. God wants to be close to us. For His birthday, will you give Him your "yes"?