

HOMILY for 4th SUNDAY of ADVENT – Year C

This Sunday Gospel tells us about an act of kindness that Mary did by visiting her relative Elizabeth. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I would like to share with you.

Centuries before mega-churches built in the suburbs & introduced awesome electric signage, churches attracted attention with cross-topped steeples. The taller the better. So, one upon a time, there was a village church with a steeple that could be seen for miles around. It was perfect, except for one thing – the bell would not ring!

The church fathers invited people from all around to try their hands at remedying the problem, but no avail. One day a small fellow came to the church & announced to the pastor, "I can make the bell ring." The pastor said, "Okay, try it."

So, the little guy climbed up to the base of the belfry in the steeple, took three step back, & then ran into the bell with his face. BONG! The bell rang, & he was hired on the spot.

One windy day, as the little man ran toward the bell, the wind moved it, causing the small bell ringer to fall out of the steeple & onto the ground below. As a crowd gathered, the pastor asked, "Does anyone know this fellow's name?" Just then a woman bent low to look at him & then replied, "I don't know his name, but his face sure rings a bell."

The little fellow in the story above was able to sacrifice himself to get the bell ring again in a village church & bring joy & great memory for all the local residents. The bell had been in that village church for years. The villagers had heard it ring across the land to call them to prayers every Sunday. They also heard it announce them about an oncoming danger like a tornado, or the death of a villager after his/her funeral service. The bell had been the heartbeat & the voice of the village. It must be sad & devastating for the villagers to see their church bell stop ringing. One day it stopped ringing & left the villagers in a quandary. It's like a few years ago, our church bell suddenly stopped ringing due to its damaged transformer. Some of our church neighbors called into the Parish Office asking why our church bell not ringing anymore & expressing how much they missed it. We worked hard to make sacrifices for it & get it fixed to bring the charming church bell back to the Kentwood area. Likewise, that caring & kind fellow wanted to get the church bell ring again in his village. He did it by making a personal sacrifice for it, literally with his face. His sacrifice had paid an enormous dividend & brought back the heartbeat & voice of the village for everyone.

The reason I have elaborated on this cute story is because it has a lot of similarities with this Sunday's Gospel story as well as the Christmas story. In this Sunday's Gospel story, we were told that "Mary set out & travelled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah & greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leapt in her womb; & Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out, 'Blessed are you among women, & blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" Evidently Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb & learned that her relative Elizabeth was blessed with a child in her old age. Instead of making Elizabeth come to visit her, Mary made her own sacrifice & went on a long journey to pay her a visit after learning about that great news. Mary basically put Elizabeth's wonderful news before her own even though she knew that her son was the divine Messiah. Like the little fellow in the church bell story above, Mary put the benefits of her relative before her own & risked her own safety to visit Elizabeth. She just wanted to share in the joy of people around her & wish them

the best instead of thinking about herself first. We have been told in another Gospel that Mary stayed with Elizabeth & took care of her for some time. That spirit of self-sacrifice & generosity is one of the important messages that this Sunday wants to highlight for us & call us to imitate. It is the same spirit that drove Jesus into our world to bring us salvation & promise of the eternal life in God's Kingdom. We need more of that spirit in our world to bring us joy & unity in this time of division & uncertainty.

Another important spiritual lesson that Mary was able to teach us is that her little act of kindness made a big difference in the lives of people around her. She made Elizabeth feel honored & humbled at the same time by her visit. She even got baby John the Baptist jump for joy in the womb. We often think that we need to do something big to change the world & make Jesus proud. We do not realize that little acts of kindness & generosity that we do for one another in the name of Jesus daily, especially for the least among us, can change hearts & move our rebellious world back to God. When we do more those little acts every day & allow God to work through us, we can create a better world, a more caring & compassionate one. So, I encourage all of us to let God work through us & do more little acts of kindness & generosity every day. We should stop preaching down on the world & making more rules & doctrines to demand it to change. Because that has not worked out since Jesus' time. Let us learn from Jesus & Mary & see how their little acts of kindness & generosity had changed many hearts & brought them home to God.

Finally, as we discuss the importance of little things, this Sunday's First Reading lets us know how God has worked effectively through those in our human history as the following: "Thus says the Lord: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; ...He shall stand firm & shepherd His flock by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, His God; ...& His greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; He shall be peace." So, Prophet Micah wanted to remind us that God chose a small town like Bethlehem to raise up a ruler for the whole country of Israel. He would shepherd the people of God & bring peace & security to the whole land. He would shepherd the people of God & bring peace & security to the whole land. He would not use his own strength & talents to carry out his work. Rather, he would allow the Lord to use him as the divine instrument & rely on the Lord for guidance & strength. His prophecy indeed came true with Jesus as He was born in Bethlehem & relied on God the Father for His mission of salvation. My friends, we live in a world that often looks down on the lowly & small countries. It takes advantage of anything small & trample down on little people. That is why powerful countries & influential people often exploit little nations & lowly people & treat them like dirt. But, today Prophet Micah wants to tell us that God cherishes little things & holds in great esteem lowly people. Remember that lowly people mean a lot more to God than powerful folks do. For God often works through lowly people & brings about spectacular miracles for the world like God did with Christmas through Bethlehem.

My dear brothers & sisters, do you feel too little & insignificant in this world? If you do, God wants you & needs you. For you are important & wonderful in God's eyes. God sure needs you to be like Mary to bring God's love & peace to the world. God calls you to do more little good deeds every day for others & help bring miracles & positive change to our current world like God did two thousand years ago.