

My Dear people of God,

It is the fourth and last Sunday of Advent! Christmas is here!

Therefore in many ways, the readings this Sunday anticipate and prepare us for Christmas. The readings get us ready for the imminent future, giving us glimpses into the mysteries that we shall be celebrating. The readings do this by bringing together the major themes found in the first three Sundays of Advent, namely: **Promise, Repentance, Transformation** and **Joy**. On this last Sunday, we are on the threshold of fulfilment, filled with anticipation of His coming, while we celebrate His presence in our midst.

Advent is a season when we stand on the threshold of fulfilment. However, it is the fulfilment of an event that has already taken place, namely the birth of Christ. And so we remember it. We ritually enact it, so that we never take it for granted, so that we never forget that it is in and through history that the marvelous deeds of God are accomplished. Each year, we pause to celebrate these events, not because they have not yet occurred but because they have happened and are happening now and again before our eyes. The celebration of anticipation is also the celebration of fulfillment, fulfillment of the promise made, fulfillment of our redemption, fulfillment of our transformation. That fulfillment will be achieved in its fullness when **He comes again in glory**.

The gospel reading today tells the story of the **Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth**. Elizabeth counted herself very blessed to be visited by Mary. On this last Sunday of Advent and in anticipation of Christmas, let us focus on the **theme of visitation**. Visitation is a great ministry and one that is rooted in the gospel: "I was sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me..." Mt. 25.36. However, it is a ministry that seems to be dying out! In the old days, when life was simpler, people visited one another a lot. But today, visitation has largely been replaced by telephone and computer. Unfortunately, a telephone call or computer communication cannot take the place of a visit.

Visitation is not an easy ministry, but it is a very fruitful one, not only for the one visited, but also for the visitor. When we visit someone, we see ourselves as doing good to those who we visit. And this is generally true. But the deeper reality is that, we too benefit, because we too are enriched. When we reach out to another person our heart comes alive. I experience this a lot when I visit the sick and homebound. Many times, I am so inspired that when I leave, I simply turn to God with gratitude and tell Him: '**I want some of that.**' That being, the grace and disposition of the person visited, especially in light of their circumstances. Indeed, one person is blessed in giving and the other is blessed receiving.

With that background, we can now more directly delve into the Visitation in our gospel reading today. Mary herself had just been visited by the angel Gabriel who had brought her the good news that she was to become the mother of the Savior, Jesus Christ. However, instead of basking in the glow of that astounding piece of news, she went off immediately to visit Elizabeth who was also expecting a child in her old age. Remember, that the angel Gabriel had informed her (Mary) about the pregnancy of her cousin/kinswoman, Elizabeth.

There is no doubt that Mary's visit meant a great deal to Elizabeth. It brought joy to her. But Mary too benefited from it. And she too rejoiced at the visit. As the elder and more

experienced of the two women, Elizabeth must have been able to help Mary. She certainly spoke some lovely words of affirmation and confirmation: “***Blessed are you who believed that the that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.***”

My dear brothers and sisters, we can and do receive by giving. One of the ways we can give is by visiting. Christmas is a great time for visiting people we may have neglected all the year long. And of course, it is a time to open ourselves to God who comes to visit us in the person of His beloved Son, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Who is God asking you to visit this season?

Maranatha- Come Lord Jesus!

God bless,

Fr. Simon Peter