

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent 2020



One of the worst scenes in a film ever, is in the film ‘David’ where Richard Gere (of Pretty Woman fame), in a loin cloth, is dancing as King David in front of the ark of the Lord as it enters Jerusalem. If Richard felt humbled by the critics’ response then he got it right as that was exactly what King David was going for in real life. King David succeeded so well that his wife Michal scolded him for embarrassing her in front of everyone by his dancing, (not the first husband nor the last to be told this), for which he promptly told her he would no longer need her as a wife, (not the usual response today fortunately). As the Bible says, she had no children from then on.

King David was not good at humility, (known for pinching his general’s wife, Bathsheba, and then getting the general conveniently bumped off). But when it came to God, and when God reminded him, he invariably did get it right.

Perhaps this makes David one of the most human of the Old Testament characters. Today he is nicely ensconced in his new home, and, perhaps not even meaning to be condescending, he says to God, ‘Let me build you a nice home too, like mine.’ God, through the Prophet Nathan, promptly reminds David that he used to be just a small town shepherd boy and it was God who got him to where he is today. Even so, God loves David and has plans for his future. A future which involves God’s own Son, Jesus.

The Church matches this story with that of Mary today as both Mary and David are part of God’s plan for our salvation. Mary of course has no need of lessons in humility. Sometimes we think of humility as a bad thing. It is often seen as making less of ourselves. Uriah Heep was a great image of false humility being as he said, ‘Ever so ‘umble.’ But the word ‘humility’ comes from the word for earth. It is simply a recognition that we are made by God, and that

our pride comes from the fact that we are made out of love for a purpose. For us ‘humility’ means that we love God for that and never forget it.

Mary is the foremost among us who is created to bring God among us. Pope John Paul II even called her ‘co-redeemer,’ with Jesus. Her humility is that she learns to know and accept this.

There is one great similarity between the two stories, and this is something that has come out of all these Advent gospels, which is that both David and Mary listened to what God had to say. In David’s case through the Prophet Nathan, in Mary’s case through the Angel Gabriel.

Last week it was John the Baptist as the Voice. Both David and Mary have problems with this. David more obviously because he is so full of himself, but Mary too, as she is frightened at what is to come, and with some reason.

But what God is asking of both of them is to be part of making the Kingdom of God present on earth.

Mary above all, in giving birth to Jesus, is seen as an image of the Church. That what Mary achieves in her life in nurturing God among us, that is just what the Church, ourselves as the Church, is being asked to do as well. Not the institutional church so much as all of us as God’s people.

What God is calling us to do is to make the Church present here on earth. The first place where we hesitate to see it is that it grows first within ourselves. When we pray the ‘Our Father’ and say, ‘May your kingdom come,’ we ask that it be present first of all within ourselves, because it is within us that Christ resides and from where the Holy Spirit guides us. Then as we realise this, through prayer and listening to God, we, together with each other, can overcome our natural fear, and embarrassment often, or our lack of humility, in making God’s kingdom known to our world.

We can be as open to God as Mary, or as difficult and stubborn as David, but God will always love us, and always have a role for us in the Kingdom, if we listen.