

## DECEMBER 23, 2018

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 [MI 5:1-4A](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19](#).

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R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Reading 2 [HEB 10:5-10](#)

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Gospel [LK 1:39-45](#)

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Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

### HOMILY:

Cowboy Joe was telling his fellow cowboys back on the ranch about his first visit to a big-city church. "When I got there, they had me park my old truck in the **corral**," Joe began. "You mean the *parking lot*," interrupted Charlie, a more-worldly fellow. "I walked up the **trail** to the door," Joe continued. "The *sidewalk* to the door," Charlie corrected him. "Inside the door, I was met by this **dude**," Joe went on. "That would be the *usher*," Charlie explained. "Well, the usher led me down the **chute**," Joe said. "You mean the *aisle*," Charlie said. "Then, he led me to a **stall** and told me to sit there," Joe continued. "*Pew*," Charlie retorted. "Pew?" recalled Joe. "Yeah, that's what that pretty lady said when I sat next her."

This comic encounter between a smelly and countrified cowboy and the church lady could also have been a sacred moment, a meeting between the cowboy and God. With instead a warm and interested welcome, the cowboy could have seen the face of God. Instead, he probably left with a sense that he did not belong amid the church, that place where Jesus promised his Presence could be found (*cf.* Matt. 18:20).

We all come here, or more precisely, are drawn here by the Holy Spirit, to have an experience of God, God-with-us. Our faith teaches that there are many rich ways that the living Lord can be experienced by the liturgy. Above all, of course, is the True Presence of the Lord in the Body and Blood of Christ. But, our God's desire to see His Presence is not limited to that unlimited place of God's dwelling. When the Word of God is proclaimed, the living God is present. In the figure of the priest, the words he prays, especially in the Words of Institution over the bread and wine ("This is my Body...this is my Blood) are the Lord's own words active in the Holy Spirit. But, another divine presence must not be ignored. Our faith teaches that Christ "... is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20)" [Constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* on the Divine Liturgy, 7].

In order for this gathering to be what we all hope it will be, a place to meet the living Lord, we all have to do our part. Our musicians carefully prepare to lead us. The preacher does his prayerful and careful homily preparation. The lectors are to practice carefully and prayerfully the Word that they will proclaim. The priest-president is to make his prayerful preparation to lead the prayer. Folks entrusted with the upkeep and preservation of our church also contribute to a worthy place of prayer. And...you too, the assembly have your sacred work to do. To prepare yourselves, prayer too is required. When we assemble, we must not underestimate Jesus' promise that when we gather, He is present in the assembly. We must not forget to minister, that is bear, the presence of Christ to all who gather with us, especially cowboys and other "strangers" who come to see God in our midst! Especially for these folks who might not normally pray with us, they need the reassurance that they are welcome and accepted. Just like being invited to a meal at a family who are strangers to us, so too our visitors (and even our own family members!) are probably anxious and seek to see our welcome and warmth as a way to know of God's presence here.

On this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, just over a day ahead of the great celebration of God-with-us at Christmas, we see in the gospel what happens when God visits His people. The figure Elizabeth the God-bearer Mary and the child in her womb, we are told, "leaped for joy." So too did the child's mother. When others experience God is present in the midst of his people, the result is ***hearts leaping for joy***. God is present, as Jesus promised, in His word, in the figure of the ministers of the church, in the Body and Blood of Christ. But...do not underestimate the divine presence in you in this Sacred Assembly. You too can, by the divine presence in you, make the hearts of others leap for joy! Our model for this is our mother Mary, who with great intention visited Elizabeth "in haste" to greet her and bear the love of God to her. Let us too proceed with haste, each time we gather, to show the divine presence of God's love in our midst, so that others might have hearts that leap for joy.

There will be many visitors (maybe even some cowboys?) who will come to join us, especially at Christmas, with anxious hearts, anxious to see God-with-us. Yes, in the PEW next to you on Christmas and every week is someone waiting to sense the divine presence in a meeting with you. Let us show that life-restoring, life-enhancing, life-supporting Presence to them! And in seeing it, may their hearts leap for joy! Our mission to share the message of Jesus requires it.