

Homily Notes for Sunday, December 24, 2017, Fourth of Advent

2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14-16; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-28

1. Our theological theme for this Fourth Sunday of Advent is “the obedience of faith.”

2. In the first reading King David is obedient to the prophet Nathan who tells him he cannot build a Temple to God.

3. The Responsorial Psalm tells us why we want to be obedient to God, that is, because of his goodness and his Covenant with us.

4. The Second Reading, from the conclusion of the Epistle to the Romans, shows that the entire purpose of his mission was to bring about “the obedience of faith to the only wise God.” Note that this is the way he begins the same letter in Romans 1:5: “Through him (Jesus Christ) we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles.”

5. Finally, in the Gospel reading we see the obedience of faith acted out in the Virgin Mary’s response to Gabriel, “Let it be done unto me according to your word.” So the last word to us in preparation for our celebration of Christmas is a call to the obedience of faith to the Lord Jesus Christ! How important is it for us, in the midst of the world in which we live, to be obedient to God?

6. How wonderful this appears! But what could get us off track from this beautiful walk with God? For example, yesterday we celebrated a wonderful 15a for Mariana Lozano. The Church was almost full. But I heard on the radio a commentary on the Quinceañera in which a young girl said she didn’t want to celebrate her Quinceañera because then she would have to go to Church! What could be the consequences of thinking and behaving in that manner? What kind of essential values were reflected in the Mass celebrating the Quinceañera?

7. Practical reflection: Pope Benedict XV did a lot of thinking about what could get us off track from a wonderful walk with God. I have been inspired by a reflection from Pope Benedict XV concerning Christmas and the birth of our Redeemer, especially from a philosophical (world view) perspective. In our Christmas Masses, tonight and tomorrow I will share the thoughts of the Pope. Today, we will look at the same kind of thought coming from Matthew Kelly who is thinking along with the Pope and whose book is available to you on the back table.

8 Role of philosophy (Matthew Kelly, *Rediscovering Catholicism*: chapter 2): A philosophy expresses the values by which we explain the most important aspects of our culture. The values present in a philosophy limit what we can imagine and what we can understand. Examples of false conclusions from false philosophies:

We are called on by God to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:2).

Ex. Miracles are scientifically impossible, therefore the Bible is false and made up of dreams.

Ex. Darwinism explains how the world came into being by random selection, therefore all teachings about God as Creator with a purpose are meaningless.

Ex. The world is ruled by a constant process of Dialectic (Hegel, etc), therefore nothing is permanent and there are no absolute moral values and so-called Divine Revelation is man-made.

9. Matthew Kelly identifies the three major practical philosophies upon which the dominant element of our modern culture has been constructed. I invite you to compare these to the values that guided Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus. Have we built our culture on rock or on sand (cf. Mt 7:24-27).

Individualism: “What’s in it for me?” It represents an all consuming concern for self. This attitude destroys any community. The rights of the individual are placed above the rights of society as a whole.

Hedonism: Assumption is that pleasure or comfort is the supreme good, the ultimate goal in life.

“If it feels good, do it.” This philosophy produces people who are lazy, lustful, and gluttonous.

“Hedonism has been a contributing factor to the demise of every culture where it has been present significantly.

“It produces enslavement by a thousand cravings and addictions. In the end it produces not pleasure, but despair.”(p.38)

Minimalism: The minimalist is always asking, “What is the least I can do?” A minimalist is always seeking to put out the minimum effort and gain the maximum reward. It is the enemy of excellence and the father of mediocrity.

10. Is this the world we are living in? Matthew Kelly asserts that it is within the “philosophical realms of individualism, hedonism, and minimalism that most people make the majority of their decisions every day.” Look at the list of consequences he gives. Could this be true of us?

11. Jesus, our Savior, comes into the darkness of a world with all these problems.

- a. He brings the light of right thinking as well as the forgiveness of sin into the world.
- b. Then, **let us consider the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, and see how her behavior and philosophical outlook contrast to the above-described modern world.
- c. Then let us decide in which philosophical framework we want to live and what we can do about it. This explains the great devotion that Catholics have for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

12. Instead of hedonism, Mary represents and lives out a life of perfect chastity and self-control, always supporting Jesus, from his conception, in the flight into Egypt, in raising him up, and in accompanying him and his disciples throughout his ministry until she was the sorrowful mother, at the foot of the Cross.

Out of respect for and obedience to God, we are to control our sensuality and sexuality, both within and outside of marriage, before and after, in order to fulfill the will of God. This is the only way we can have stable families, families in which there is a father and a mother, totally committed to the good of their children, sacrificing a great deal for the future of their children, embodying in their lives the agape love of Jesus.

13. The Blessed Virgin Mary remained perpetually a virgin. She and Joseph never had relations! How hard that is for us to imagine today! How about this for sexual holiness and the honoring of our bodies!

14. Instead of the material security, comfort and pleasure they could have had as a normally married couple, they chose to give up everything for the sake of the Redeemer! They could have said, “Let’s abort this baby and avoid all this trouble.” Rather they fled into Egypt, taking all their possessions on their backs and maybe on a donkey. Then they returned to Galilee, living a very simple life. Instead of relative quiet and comfort, Mary and her companions are always depicted as traveling with Jesus and taking care of Him and his disciples all the way to the foot of the Cross. We remember the words of Jesus, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26-27). Jesus demanded a total commitment to himself and to the Father.

15. Instead of minimalism, the Blessed Virgin Mary practiced maximalism, the total commitment of herself to Jesus and his mission. She demonstrated the obedience of faith in every way. She and Joseph were totally committed to raising Jesus in their Jewish traditions, fulfilling the law and its precepts. Mary was willing to undergo whatever shame and derision she would have because of the Virgin Birth and Joseph clearly listened to God for the good and the protection of his family.

16. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Blessed Joseph subordinated their individualistic desires and fulfillment to the plan of God and the good of Jesus. They found the seeking after pleasures and comfort irrelevant to their mission in life. They did not give the minimum but the maximum that they could to support the salvific mission of Jesus. And Jesus did it all. This is why we revere and imitate both Mary and Joseph as excellent examples discipleship, of being faithful to God.

17. Modern Liberalism cannot afford to be self-conscious about its own principles because it is living primarily out of the philosophies of individualism (self), hedonism (pleasure), and minimalism (self-indulgence). Christians have an opportunity to live in reality, to live according to the Wisdom of God.

18. Life Application: I invite everyone to reflect upon yourselves. What are the principles that dominate your life? Are you living out the principles presented by God in the Bible, in the lives of the saints, and in the model of the Blessed Virgin Mary? What a blessing it is to live in a society based on the peaceful principles of Jesus Christ!

19. See Kelly, ch 3, on the relevance of Jesus and the benefits faith in Him has brought to Western Culture.

