

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 1:46-55

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

***“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.”*** We like verses like that when they’re directed at someone else, when the proverbial bad guy is brought low, when Hitler dies like a coward in a bunker below Berlin or Saddam Hussein like a rat crawls out of a pathetic hole in the ground in Iraq. But when we are the proud, and we must be humbled, how often don’t we protest, or complain, or waver in faith, or even shake our fists at God. When it is our time to be disciplined as the beloved sons and daughters of God, to be tested through trial, to be stripped of our pride, or selfishness, our envy, jealousy, or greed, how often aren’t we inclined to let the God of the crucifix shrink from our view and long for a god who delivers only ease and luxury, immediate gratification and the fading glory of the fallen?

If you study parenting, you’ll quickly learn that the worst thing a parent can do for a child is give that child whatever he or she wants when he or she wants it, to provide for that child a life of only ease and luxury. Such parenting creates selfish children unable to sympathize with the world around them, unaware of the suffering of others. Such parenting produces children unable to cope with the adversity of real life. Such parenting produces a sense of entitlement, a selfishness that views others and all around them as that which exists to serve without even a momentary notion of a vice versa relationship. And most importantly such parenting doesn’t equip a child to truly learn to love, because love is learned and exercised precisely in adversity, when there’s nothing to be had in it for the one doing the loving, in those times when it is more than a feeling and less than easy to show.

***“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”*** Do you fear God? Is He truly God to you, that is, the Almighty and your Lord, or is He merely there for you to call upon when you want something, like a waitress to bring you treats or a busboy to clean up your messes? Do you recognize His will for you as advice to pick and choose from, or as commands that when broken bring eternal damnation? Do you laugh at what He calls sin as though His Word is a big joke or do you realize that no one with such an attitude will be laughing when they stand before Him on Judgment Day? If you’ve found yourself falling into such attitudes, beware. Your day is coming. You will be humbled. Pray it is now, while there is time for repentance, and not eternally in hell. Mary’s song is clear. The mighty must be taught the fear of the Lord, and the lowly will be comforted by Him.

***“My soul magnifies the Lord.”*** The Greek word here means “to enlarge or extend.” When the Lord has allowed crosses to come into your life, has His cross been enlarged or extended in your view, or has it shrunk into the background as worry and anxiety took over, or an angry desire to get even, or a self-centered desire to be justified and vindicated, not in the eyes of God, but in your own eyes? Have you worried more about what other people think of you or about what Christ, who thought highly enough of you to die for you, thinks of you? Have you served to get something out of your service, or to freely serve as Christ has served to you? Have you lived to give glory to God or to garner glory for yourself?

***“My soul magnifies the Lord.”*** Remember, dear Christian brothers and sisters, that God often strips us of those things that we love most, that most consume our thoughts and plans and hopes and desires, precisely so that He might fill the void left behind, that He might be magnified in our souls, that the hole we stuffed with things that could never truly fill it before, things that were not indeed God, might instead now be filled with that which will make us whole, with that peace of sin forgiven that St. Paul says ***“surpasses all understanding”*** and ***“will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”***

There are two types of people who never truly learn to love and praise God, though they might pay Him lip service. The first are those who only praise Him when He does them well in their opinion. The second are those who steal credit for His gifts for themselves and use His gifts for their own glory instead of His. Both never from experience learn what it is to love God, to trust Him, and to praise Him, because both are unwilling to be brought low, to be humbled.

God is good. ***“And his mercy is for those who fear him.”*** Rejoice when He teaches us to do just that, when He at times brings us low in order to again raise us up as new creations, focused not upon our own bellies or personal glorification and magnification in our own eyes or the eyes of others, but rather upon our neighbors benefit and the glory of this Child who has been brought low all the way to a stable in Bethlehem in order to raise us one day up with Him into the beatific vision of His Father and the eternal joy of His kingdom.

Friends in Christ, there’s no tear you can cry now underneath your crosses that He who hung upon a cross for you won’t then wipe away. There is no loss you can here suffer in Him who has suffered for you that, as with Job, He will not repay twofold there. There is no disappointment you can now endure for the sake of Christian love that will not then be turned to joy in the undeserved gift of paradise found. This Child would hardly be for me what Mary calls Him, ***“God my Savior,”*** if I worked and hoped for there never to be anything from which He might be just that, from which He might save me, and if, when such times came, I became so consumed with my predicament that I never stopped to see His pierced hand, strong to save and outstretched to lift me up.

Faith is the gift of God, created and instructed through God’s Word, but tested and trained in experience. Don’t throw in the towel when you find yourself in the ring in which Baptism has placed you, fighting with your sinful flesh, with the world, and perhaps even with hurt caused you by those who claim to or are called to love you most. No, that’s precisely the time to fight on. And the great thing is that this battle of faith is not a solo deal, but a tag team, and the Lord has been there before and won, and His arm is strong. Our Jesus rests in a manger in the days to come, but don’t be fooled. That baby is no pushover. He is Almighty God, and in Him, in the trustworthy care of His tiny though divine hands, ***“we live and move and have our being”*** (Acts 17:28). Amen.