



19 December 2018

CHRISTMAS NOVENA – Fourth Day

Year C

Putting Our Trust in God

On this fourth day of our Novena we are reminded that, occasionally, God challenges people to trust Him even when He plans to do “impossible things.” The episode of the disbelief of Zechariah warns us that those who doubt God’s word will be left to witness, ashamed and speechless, the fulfillment of the divine plan. On the other hand, those who accept God’s plan in full trust and are ready to cooperate become His partners and instruments of His love and power.

Today’s liturgy challenges us to choose between being spectators of God’s wonders or His enthusiastic collaborators along the highway of salvation history.

In today’s liturgy we are also invited to reflect on and pray for the elderly and the childless “titas” in our families. Their happiness depends so much on how we treat them.



INTRODUCTORY RITES



Entrance Antiphon

(To be recited only when no Entrance Hymn is sung.)

He who is to come will come and will not delay, and now there will be no fear within our land, for he is our Savior.

Greeting

P –Blessed be the Lord, our God, the source of all life and hope. May His grace and peace be with you all!

All–**And with your spirit!**

Penitential Act

P –Coming together as God’s family on this fourth day of our Novena, with confidence let us ask the Lord’s forgiveness and strength. *(Pause)*

P –For the times we have

doubted the power of your word, Lord, have mercy!

All–**Lord, have mercy!**

P –For the times we have doubted the depth and sincerity of your love, Christ, have mercy!

All–**Christ, have mercy!**

P –For the times we have doubted the wisdom of your plans for us, Lord, have mercy!

All–**Lord, have mercy!**

P –May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

All–**Amen!**

Gloria

All–Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we

adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen!

Collect (Opening Prayer)

P –God of life, in the child who was born of the Virgin Mary you revealed to the

world the radiance of your glory. Grant that we may celebrate with full and reverent faith this great mystery of the Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.
All—Amen!



1st Reading *Jgs 13:2-7.24-25*
The extraordinary conception of Samson by a barren woman foreshadows the conception of John the Baptist by the elderly, barren Elizabeth.

R —A proclamation from the Book of Judges

There was a certain man from Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children. An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Though you are barren and have had no children, yet you will conceive and bear a son. Now, then, be careful to take no wine or strong drink and to eat nothing unclean. As for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb. It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines.”

The woman went and told her husband, “A man of God came to me; he had the appearance of an angel of God, terrible indeed. I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, ‘You will be with child and will bear a son. So take neither wine nor strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For the boy shall be consecrated to God from the womb, until the day of his death.’”

The woman bore a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up and the Lord blessed him. The spirit of the Lord stirred him.

The Word of the Lord!
All—Thanks be to God!

Responsorial Psalm *Ps 71*

R —*My mouth shall be filled with your praise, and I will sing your glory!*

R. M. Velez



* **Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress. O my God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked.**

R.

* **For you are my hope, O Lord; my trust, O God, from my youth. On you I depend from birth; from my mother’s womb you are my strength.**

* **I will treat of the mighty works of the Lord: O God, I will tell of your singular justice. O God, you have taught me from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds.**

R.

Gospel Acclamation

All—Alleluia! Alleluia!

O, Root of Jesse’s stem, sign of God’s love for all his people: Come to save us without delay! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Gospel *Lk 1:5-25*

The conception of John the Baptist is an important step in the fulfillment of God’s plan, for John’s mission will be so closely associated with that of the Messiah. The announcement to Zechariah foreshadows the Annunciation which Mary will receive in Nazareth.

P —The Lord be with you!

All—And with your spirit!

P —A proclamation from the holy Gospel according to Luke

All—Glory to you, O Lord!

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the

priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Once when he was serving as priest in his division’s turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.”

Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he

stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.

After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

The Gospel of the Lord!
All—Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Homily

Prayer of the Faithful

P —Encouraged by the interest of the Lord in our good, let us present to Him our humble supplications as we say together:

All—**Almighty God, we trust in You!**

C —For all believers throughout the world: May they receive the Word of God with humble faith and live it out in their lives. Let us pray! *R.*

C —For the Holy Father and all other religious and civil leaders: May their example of dedication, honesty, and generous service to their communities be an inspiration to all. Let us pray! *R.*

C —For all parents, teachers, and catechists: May they see in all children as many precious gifts from the Lord and raise them according to God's will. Let us pray! *R.*

C —For the elderly in our families and our community: May they continue to offer their contribution of wisdom and prayer and never doubt God's special love for them. Let us pray! *R.*

C —For the couples who cannot have children: May they consider the possibility of adopting some of the thousands of babies who have

been rejected by their parents. Let us pray! *R.*

C —Let us pray in silence for our personal intentions. (*Pause*) Let us pray! *R.*

P —Open our hearts, Lord, to receive Your Word with faith and generosity, always mindful that You want our good and that nothing is impossible to You. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All—Amen!



Preparation of the Gifts

P —Pray, brethren . . .
All—May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P —Look mercifully, Lord, on the gifts we lay upon your altar and by your power consecrate what we bring to you in our weakness.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All—Amen!

Preface of Advent II

P —The Lord be with you!

All—**And with your spirit!**

P —Lift up your hearts!

All—**We lift them up to the Lord!**

P —Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

All—**It is right and just!**

P —It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist spoke of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.

It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
All—**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest!**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Memorial Acclamation

P —The mystery of faith!

All—When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again!



All—Our Father . . .

P —Deliver us, Lord . . .

All—For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

Sign of Peace

Breaking of the Bread

All—Lamb of God . . .

Communion

P —Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.

All—**Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.**

Communion Antiphon

(To be recited only when no Communion Hymn is sung.)

The Dawn from on high will visit us, guiding our feet in the way of peace.

Prayer after Communion

P —Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gifts you have bestowed. Create in us a desire for blessings yet to come, that we may welcome the birth of Christ our Savior with free and devoted hearts.

We make our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord.

All—Amen!

CONCLUDING RITES



P –The Lord be with you.
All–And with your spirit!

P –Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing.
(Pause)
May the Lord fill you

with respect and care for the elderly.

All–Amen!

P –May He strengthen your faith in Him.

All–Amen!

P –May He make you joyful in hope and untiring in love all the days of your life.

All–Amen!

P –May almighty God bless you: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All–Amen!

P –Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life.

All–Thanks be to God!



ZECHARIAH, THE SKEPTIC

Zechariah had been a good man all through his life. He and his wife Elizabeth, as we are told by the Evangelist Luke, “were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly.” (See today’s Gospel.) That was as things were supposed to be since Zechariah belonged to the priestly tribe of Levi and from time to time had the privilege to perform his priestly duty in the Temple. It is also quite probable that in his younger days he had been a “dreamer,” as most young people are. **But as his wife Elizabeth was not able to bear him any children**, with the passing of the years, **Zechariah had lost much of his zest for life**. He saw himself deprived of the joy of seeing himself “duplicated” in his children. Understandably, he looked with ill-concealed envy at the lively broods of children that enlivened the houses of most of his contemporaries and colleagues.

For a time he must even have been angry with God in seeing himself **unable to find a satisfactory answer to the question why he and his wife should remain childless, in spite of all their prayers and good behavior**, while even rascals were not denied such a favor. Eventually, however, he had come to accept what he could not change, but in the process he had grown skeptical. The poor man had lost interest in life, as he saw himself condemned to die deprived of the caring presence of children and of the lively noise of grandchildren. In his old age he had learned to live without hope, except the hope that he might die before his wife.

We understand, then, why he reacted the way he did to **the vision and message of the angel in the Temple**, as we have read in today’s Gospel. That message was absolutely thrilling. It spoke of no less than the birth of the precursor of the long-awaited

Messiah, a new Elijah who had the breathtaking mission of preparing the people to welcome the Messiah. Such a piece of good news and privilege would have made even the most powerful man in Israel leap with joy and gratitude to the Lord.

But old Zechariah answered with a demand that revealed all the depth of his skepticism. “How shall I know this?” As if to say: “I want a proof of what you said.” And the sentence that followed explains the reason for his lack of a positive response to the angel’s enthusiastic message. “I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” Humanly speaking, he was right. No one expects a decrepit person to have the physical capability to generate a child. But, as a pious Jew, nay as a priest of the Lord Most High, he should have known better. **He should have known that the Lord of Israel has the power to make everything possible and to make even what seems “impossible” happen.** The whole Exodus event proved this. So did the return of the exiles from Babylon. Such was the recurring message of the prophets – an invitation to trust with obedient faith the God who does the “impossible.”

Poor Zechariah at that stage in his life no longer had such a strong, dynamic faith in God. His horizon had shrunk to the small confines of what man can or cannot do. As a consequence of his disbelief, Zechariah lost his power of speech. Not for ever, though, but only for as long as it was needed for him to realize the truth of the angel’s message, as we shall see in a few days from now.

How many in our midst are like old Zechariah? How many Christians, nowadays, **have stopped believing that nothing is impossible to God** and live like the unbelieving lot for whom what counts is only what they and their technical gadgets can do. Such is the tragedy of those who no longer believe in the wonderful reality of God’s power.

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