

**Sunday, December 21, 2014**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion**

(2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12,14,16; Psalm 89:2-5,27,29; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38)

***Advent: A Time to Give Glory to God***

*The Lord ... will establish a house for you. (2 Samuel 7:11)*

Imagine David's surprise when God denied his request to build a temple but promised instead to build a house for David—a royal dynasty that would never end!

Like David, we often think that human hands can build a house for God. We think if we spend enough time accomplishing tasks in our churches or doing enough charitable works, we can establish his kingdom on earth. We tend to forget that the Christian life has just as much to do with humbly receiving unmerited grace from a powerful and generous God. We tend to forget God's greatest desire—to build his personality, his priorities, and his passions within us.

There is a wonderful story about the late Vietnamese cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan who, while still a young bishop, was arrested and imprisoned by his government. Van Thuan was so devastated at not being able to complete the projects that he had started for God that he went nights without sleeping. Then one night he heard a voice saying, "Everything you have done and desire to continue doing ... are God's works, but they are not God. Choose God and not the works of God."

These words changed Van Thuan's whole way of thinking. He found a new peace and strength to surmount moments in prison that were almost unbearable.

In his book, *Testimony of Hope*, Cardinal Van Thuan referred to Mary as a prime example of choosing God and not the works of God. "She abandoned her projects without fully understanding the mystery that was being accomplished in her body and in her destiny." By her fiat, Mary allowed God to build within her a house for Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. May we follow her example and let God build his house within and among us.

*"Jesus, I surrender to you. Come and dwell within me, so that I may give you glory."*

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

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***Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion***

1. In the first reading, God gives David this extraordinary promise through the prophet Nathan: “I will raise up your offspring after you, sprung from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom are firm forever before me; your throne shall be firmly established forever.” In what ways were the prophetic words by Nathan to David partially fulfilled in Solomon, his son, and completely fulfilled in Jesus?
2. Who of us wouldn't want Nathan's promise for ourselves, that is, that God will establish our house and our family forever. Yet each of us has an opportunity, through the grace of God, to affect our homes and our families for eternity. What might you do this Christmas season to bring members of your family to a deeper faith in Christ?
3. The responsorial psalm also contains prophetic words about the coming king who will establish his “throne for all generations.” How do these words, and Nathan's prophetic words in the first reading, fulfill the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary in the Gospel reading?
4. The responsorial psalm also speaks of the Lord's goodness, promises, faithfulness, and kindness. What steps can you take in your times of prayer to focus more on praising God for these attributes, rather than just asking for things?
5. The entire second reading is just one long sentence. It is simply a prayer of praise to God. It acknowledges God for strengthening us according to the “gospel,” the good news. In what ways have you been strengthened by the Gospel message, the Good News of Jesus Christ?
6. The Gospel reading is so familiar to us we may be inclined to pass over it too quickly. But when we look closely we see that the angel actually did not give Mary very many details about what her life would be like. And yet she accepted it unconditionally without insisting on knowing its impact on her. What a model she is for us. How about you? When you believe God is asking something of you, do you focus on how it will impact you or on trusting in God's will for your life? Do you sometimes place conditions on God when he asks something of you? Can you give an example?
7. The meditation ends with these words: “By her fiat, Mary allowed God to build within her a house for Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. May we follow her example and let God build his house within and among us.” What are some steps you can take to follow Mary's example and open yourself to God's “unmerited grace” and allow him to build within you “a house for Jesus Christ”? Why is building “a house for Jesus Christ” more than just doing good works? Why is it more about allowing Jesus to transform us more and more into his image and likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 12:2)?
8. Take some time now to pray for the grace to give your life unconditionally to Jesus and to say yes to his call for your life. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a member of the NSC Council and a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>), a ministry of **The Word Among Us** ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) to the Military, Prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>), for which he is currently a Trustee. He can be contacted at [mblumberg@wau.org](mailto:mblumberg@wau.org) or [mblumberg@aol.com](mailto:mblumberg@aol.com)].