

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

2nd Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Responsorial: Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Advent: A Time to Thank the Lord for His Unmerited Grace and Favor

You have found favor with God. (Luke 1:30)

We all know how special Mary is. After all, God chose her to be the mother of his Son. But just because Mary is special, that doesn't mean you are ordinary. You're special too! Like her, you have found God's favor—unmerited and undeserved grace from heaven. In fact, God loves you so much that he sent his Son into the world, not to condemn you, but to save you (John 3:17). That's pretty special!

The Greek word for "favor" in this passage can mean "grace" as well. Mary is full of grace—but so are you. God has filled you with his grace so that you can become "graceful" just as Mary was. She was graceful not because she had perfect etiquette or social skills. Mary was graceful because of the way God's grace molded and formed her.

Scripture tells us God has given us an "abundance" of his grace (Romans 5:17). It's always with us, like a spring bubbling up in our hearts. There is no end to what this grace can do in our lives. Paul tells us that God's grace is "sufficient" even to make God's power "perfect" in our lives (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This grace moves us to be unselfish, kind, and generous to everyone we meet. It helps us to forgive other people and to let go of our hurts. Most of all, the grace of God empowers us to be more and more like him. That's what grace did in Mary's life, and it's what grace can do in our lives.

Tomorrow is Christmas Day. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all sit quietly and let the grace that is in us convince us that Jesus is Lord? That's what Mary did as she spent time pondering God's greatness and his grace in her life (Luke 2:19). In fact, the best Christmas present we can give Jesus is to let his grace well up in our hearts. Remember: you are special. You are filled with God's grace. So just sit with the Lord, and let that grace touch your heart.

"Thank you, Lord, for your grace and favor."

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Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. In the first reading, God gives David this extraordinary promise through the prophet Nathan: “I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.”
 - In what ways were the prophetic words of Nathan to David partially fulfilled in Solomon, his son, and completely fulfilled in Jesus?
 - 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 say or do this during this Christmas season to help bring members of your family to a deeper faith in Christ?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: “The promises of the LORD I will sing forever; through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness. For you have said, ‘My kindness is established forever’; in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.”
 - What steps can you take in your times of prayer to focus more on praising God for his promises, faithfulness, and kindness, rather than just asking for things?
3. The responsorial psalm also contains prophetic words about the coming king, for example: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: Forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your 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?
 - What impact do these prophetic words have on your own faith in Jesus as Lord and King?
4. The entire second reading is just one long sentence. It is a prayer of praise to God and opens with these words: “To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings.” It ends with these words: “to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
 - In what ways have you been strengthened by the “gospel,” the Good News of Jesus Christ?
 - Are you willing to share these ways with your family, friends, neighbors, or other people?
5. 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 Gabriel gave Mary a lot of details about the son she would bear as a virgin, but he did not give her very many details about what her life would be like afterwards. Yet Mary accepted it unconditionally without insisting on knowing its impact: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. Then the angel departed from her.”
 - What a model Mary 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 do you focus 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?
6. The meditation ends with these words: “Tomorrow is Christmas Day. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all sit quietly and let the grace that is in us convince us that Jesus is Lord? That's what Mary did as she spent time pondering God's greatness and his grace in her life (Luke 2:19). In fact, the best Christmas present we can give Jesus is to let his grace well up in our hearts. Remember: you are special. You are filled with God's grace. So just sit with the Lord, and let that grace touch your heart.”
 - What do these words from the meditation mean to you?
 - What are some steps you can take to follow Mary's example and open yourself more to God's unmerited grace?
7. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for the unmerited and undeserved grace and favor you have received from him. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Thank you, Lord, for your grace and favor.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **Christlife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org).

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

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