



23 December 2018, 8 a.m. | 4th Sunday of Advent Year C
Micah 5:2-5 | Psalm 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19 | Hebrews 10:5-10 |
Luke 1:39-45

REACHING OUT TO THOSE IN NEED

Homily

Dear sisters and brothers, these days there is an interesting video circulating on Whatsapp. Not all videos are worth watching, but I looked at this one by accident and found it very inspiring. Many of you might have received and seen it – it is about a secret Santa. It's a description of a true incident that took place in Phoenix, America. There was a beggar who stood at a certain place to ask for alms. It was the season of Christmas, and people were either rushing to work or busy shopping. Many people walked past the beggar in a hurry, but there were a few who stopped and gave him a few coins. In return, he would take out a hundred-dollar note and offer it to them. This shocked the people who received a hundred dollars as a reward for the little sacrifice they made – firstly by stopping and secondly, by offering him a small token of alms.

One of the persons who stopped and gave the beggar a few coins was on his way to buy Christmas gifts for his children, and he realised that he had limited money. When he received the hundred-dollar note, he was surprised and happy because he could now buy what he wanted for his children.

Behind this incident was a rich businessman who would give out thousands of dollars to people in need every year. Disguised as a beggar, he gave three thousand dollars at random to people who stopped to help a person in need.

This tells us that when we stop and attend to those in need, we too will receive a reward that is greater than what we have offered. We see this very beautifully in the encounter between two cousins, Mary and Elizabeth, in today's gospel. This encounter was an experience of joy. The visitation is a meeting of two cousins, both of whom are pregnant, both in a situation of need. Elizabeth, being advanced in age, would possibly have had a difficult pregnancy. Yet, she welcomes Mary into her home. The gospel says Mary lived with her for three months. Mary, probably a teenage girl, was inexperienced, and, as we know from our own customs, a new mother-to-be often goes to the home of her family so that she can receive the care and concern of her own mother. She lives there till she delivers her child, because in her first pregnancy, a woman could be helpless and anxious, and the experience of her mother would be a great help to her. But Mary forgets her own needs and concerns and reaches out to Elizabeth.

The gospel also says that Mary leaves in haste, which means it was a spontaneous decision: to hear of a need and to respond to it immediately. Mary does that with great generosity. We know, from understanding the historical and geographical context of this incident, that Mary would have to walk through the hill country of Judah, and so it must have been a difficult journey of a hundred and fifty kilometres. She went, not on the back of a donkey, not on horseback, not in a vehicle, but on foot – a demanding and challenging journey during her pregnancy. These details are noted by the gospel writer, Luke, who is himself a physician and knows the physical condition of a woman in pregnancy.

An interesting incident takes place when Mary reaches the home of Elizabeth. The gospel says the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy. There was probably an experience of the child's movement in the womb, which was a joyful moment for Elizabeth. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and in that fullness, she exclaimed the words of a prayer that we say every day – the Hail Mary. That prayer is given to us by the Church, and as we pray the Hail Mary, we are also called to experience that same joy that Elizabeth experienced when she heard the greeting of Mary.

We will have many encounters during this season of Christmas. Let us pray first of all that we may make it a point, like Mary, to think beyond ourselves. All of us have problems and difficulties, and the best way to get out of them is to reach out to someone else in need. When we do that, we experience the joy of giving. I know that many of our communities make it a point to visit a home or orphanage during this time, and share the joy of Christmas with people who are less fortunate. I also heard that one of our first communicants did not have a party on the day of their first communion but decided to go to a home for aged people and spend the day with them. This was a very beautiful gesture of selflessness, generosity and concern.

All of us are invited to reach out in love and service, not only to those who are good to us and make us happy, but also to those who are in greater need and difficulties than ourselves. Then we too will truly experience the joy of Christmas. Let us pray that we may make this season joyful for others so that the presence of the Holy Spirit may be upon each one of us and in our homes, so that we experience a true inner joy that brings us fulfilment in life, Amen.



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church