

December 24, 2006  
Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning!! Today of course is the last Mass to end Advent. And tonight, of course, well in just a couple of hours we start Christmas! And as we focus this close to Christmas – the Fourth Sunday of Advent – the focus is on Mary. Friday, Fr. Nick Rouch, my classmate, went up and saw “The Nativity.” Great movie – I encourage you to see it because it reminds us of human it was – how real it all was when Mary found at that at 14 years old she was to be with child, and she had never even been with a man, and the fear and all of the accusations that happened in the midst of it. And so, we focus on Mary and we see in the gospel today that Elizabeth does the same. When Mary comes to Elizabeth, Elizabeth says “blessed are you who believed – blessed are you who believed.” And that echo’s throughout all history of the church! And not only was Mary blessed because she believed, but we too are blessed if we believe. Mary believed in all of the Old Testament and she believed that God would fulfill everything that He promised. She believed in her own personal life – when God made a promise to her and told her that something was going to happen, she believed that it was going to take place. And she believed that her Son, the Savior was born and would redeem the world. And so it had to do with her belief in the past, her belief in the present and her belief in the future. And so, Mary comes and is the example for us – that we too need to be people who believe. First of all in the reality of what Christ did for us – when He was born – if you were at the Penance Service you heard “you shall name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sin.” The whole reason that Jesus Christ came was to die. He was born to die to save us from our sins. And what we have to do is believe that. That what Jesus Christ did 2,000 years ago, He did for you and He did for me. And this is a real event – it wasn’t just some la la thing we believe in a ritual of our history. You know on 60 Minutes or 20/20 the other day – when I was sitting there wrapping presents, because I am still not done, and as I am wrapping presents I am watching this to keep me busy, and there was something on called “Heaven.” And they were talking about whether there is a heaven or there isn’t a heaven. You know, I always love when pagans talk about this reality, because it is an intellectual gymnastics event, huh? And as they are going on, there is this one guy that talks about there is a “god gene” inside of each one of us, and this “god gene” is put there by nature to make us believe. That is why it’s in that book its called “Why God Won’t Go Away.” That’s why all these things happen because we have a gene that makes us believe in God. So what this means, of course is that there is no God, it is just a natural reality. And that is what some of them come to a conclusion of. “Huh, well that’s nice, well we’re all stupid...” You know, John Paul II was the stupidest guy who ever lived if you believe in God. Or, just maybe, this gene that is inside of us, which they have shown, was planted there by God to remind us to have that hunger inside of us that I am always here.

That you can never, ever, live without me. Just maybe. And so, what we have to do is have faith that this is real. And it doesn't just become real in the past – that means it has to happen in our daily lives. And that means that when God speaks to us and we are in our prayer every day and we are listening to God – correct? Say “yes Father.” Some of you are liars...but anyway the reality is that when we are coming to God every day and listening in prayer, then we believe, and the way we believe is by acting on it. Mary believed, and then she acted – she moved. When I was a kid – 17 years old – and He said “I want you to be a priest...” I left my life, I left my family, I came to Erie because the Lord said “I want you to be a priest.” And I said “ok, I believe you.” Left it all. When I was going to be ordained – “I believe you.” Left it all. When He wanted me to come to St. Joseph's – I believed Him. Left it all. When I started Perpetual Adoration Chapel – I believed Him. The Bishop said no three times, but I believed God. And you must act on your belief! You just can't sit there and say “oh, I believe, I believe...” Well so what! What are you doing about what you believe? What are you doing in your daily life – when you are listening to the Lord and He says to you – like He said to Mary – “this is what I want from you.” Do you act on it? No? (A baby yelled that out!) Well you should! Of course you and I should! That's how faith becomes real! And then the final thing that we have to believe – just as God has taken care of us in the past – just as God in our daily life leads and guides us if we are obedient to Him – so too in the future that we are not made for this world. That God – all the promises that He has made to us – we have to believe that God will fulfill them. And what that should do in this season of Advent is give us great, great hope that no matter what, it is ok because the God of the Universe has made you and me promises. And if you know somebody, I mean that you really, really know them, and you trust them – when they promise something to you – you know that they will fulfill their promise. Well if you and I really know Jesus Christ, if we spend time with Him every day – that when He promises us that we will live forever in Him, we have to believe that. Because we trust in Him. Because God is not a liar – because He is real. And see, you can sit there and debate all these things and argue about these things and watch 60 Minutes and say “oh, I wonder if it's real – I wonder if it's not...” or you can be in such a relationship with Christ that you know it. When we look at the Saints – Padre Pio – Padre Pio could be in two places at one time. That wasn't because of a “god gene” – that was because of the grace of God. Padre Pio could have the Stigmata for 50 years – have a hole right through His hand and then when he died – it was gone. Padre Pio – people would come to him – and because he believed – great things happened. This isn't because of some gene – it is because when someone is alive in Christ – and they believe in Him – with all of their being – God can do great things. And that is what the response has to be today – and I would encourage you – that before evening Mass tonight – to go and continue on this reading in the gospel and it says “blessed are you who believe that the word proclaimed to you by God would be fulfilled.” And then Mary's response to that is what. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is His name.” That we should be able to proclaim that every day! That He who is mighty has done great things for me! Holy is His name! Has He done great things for you?

And you know He has! So proclaim “Holy is His name!” This Christmas, spend some time with the Magnificat – let it echo through your being as you prepare for the coming of Christ once again – into this world and into your heart. May each of you know His love today and forever – Amen.