**4th Sunday of Advent – Cycle A**

December 21/22, 2013

Isaiah 7: 10-14; Romans 1: 1-7; Matthew 1: 18-24

“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus… I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ…. I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.” – Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium (1)*

We all are called to proclaim to the entire world what we have encountered: Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

We are called to bring a message of joy and of hope to our world; the message that Jesus has redeemed us all by his life, death and resurrection; that he came to bring us life, fullness of life, eternal life; that he comes into our lives and into our world each and every day, and that he will come on the last day to judge us on how well we have loved others, especially the poor.

None of us is exempt from doing this. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis reminds us that we must first encounter Jesus, encounter him by ***listening to him,*** listening to the Word of God who is Jesus Christ, listening to Jesus speak to us in the sacraments, listening to Jesus speak through the teachers of the Church, especially the bishops, priests and deacons, and in a special way listening to Jesus speaking in the lives of the poor, the sick, the rejected members of our society.

“Listen, O House of David! The Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel” God is with us.

How can we know and recognize the Son of God in the Child of Bethlehem if we have not first listened to God speak? We must listen to the Word of God speak to us so we will be prepared to recognize Jesus in the manger and in the stable, surrounded by the poor, who were the first heard the Good News and bore witness to Jesus’ birth.

Yes, we must listen to Jesus and to his Body, the Church! A listening heart is like a fertilized field. Listening prepares our hearts to receive the seed, the Word of God who is Jesus Christ.

Mary listened to God’s word spoken to her by the archangel Gabriel. She listened and then conceived the Son of God. She became the Mother of God and our spiritual mother because she listened and obeyed. Jesus came into this world when Mary listened and obeyed. He will come into your life too if you do the same.

Saint Joseph listened, as we heard in the Gospel today. He listened and obeyed and then received both the Mother of God and the Son of God into his life and home and he will come into your family too if you do the same.

Yes, we must listen to God’s word, to Jesus, and then respond as Mary responded, as Saint Joseph responded by taking Jesus into our lives and our world. We then after hearing and accepting, we must go out and tell others that the Christ has come, that he is coming now, and he will come again!

My friends, Jesus comes now, each and every day. His Incarnation is, in a certain sense, completed when we listen to his Word and take it into our lives, into our hearts and live it out in caring for the poor. We become the eyes and ears, the hands and the feet of Jesus when we listen and obey.

Jesus comes now, each and every time we hear God’s Word proclaimed and preached, a word that, as the Scriptures say, is a two-edged sword that penetrates deeply into our hearts. He comes now, each and every time we listen to that Word and we allow Jesus Christ to become a part of us, a part of our lives.

Jesus comes now, each and every time a sacrament is celebrated. We encounter him in all the sacraments, when we are baptized and confirmed, when we confess our sins to a priest, when we marry in the Church, when we are anointed in the Sacrament of the Sick, when we are ordained deacons, priests or bishops, and most especially here at Mass in the Eucharist.

Jesus comes into our world each and every time we reach out and touch the life of a poor man or woman, each time we listen to them, each time we feed them, each time we shelter them, each time we visit them in prison, each time we care for them when they are sick in our nursing homes and hospitals, each time we clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant or bury the dead.

Jesus will come again over and over again in these ways and in many other hidden ways, until that glorious and most obvious day when he will come victoriously to judge the living and the dead.

Let us always be listening, always preparing, ready for the coming of the Lord. God speaks. Jesus continually comes into our world. We can’t predict the time, the hour, or the place, but we know with certainty that he comes.

Be prepared!

Come, Lord Jesus, come!