**4th Sunday of Advent, Cycle A**

December 17/18, 2016

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

God’s message to St. Joseph was given to him in a dream. “*Do not be afraid!* Open wide the doors of your heart and your home to Jesus, and to his mother, Mary!”

*Open wide your heart and your home!*

The angel Gabriel gave Mary a similar message at the Annunciation when he said, “Do not be afraid Mary, you who are full of grace. Open wide the doors of your life to receive your savior, Jesus.”

God gives us a very similar message. “Do not be afraid to take Jesus into your life and then take him into the world.”

Do not be afraid to take Jesus into your life, and once you have taken him into your life, and then bear him into the world. Open wide the doors to receive him! Open wide your heart and your home to Jesus this Christmas. Bring him into the world. This is our Catholic, our Christian vocation!

The question is do we have the faith necessary to do this? Do we have enough love in our hearts to welcome him this Christmas?

Let’s take a step back in fill in the story we heard in the Gospel today. Can you imagine the scene? Mary coming to her betrothed husband, Joseph, and saying, “I’m pregnant, but I am still a virgin.” Joseph must have thought, “Mary, you can’t have it both ways. It doesn’t happen that way.” Then Mary, sensing his anxiety, saying, “It’s not what you think, Joseph. God did this to me. I simply said, “Yes”. It is a real baby. I can feel him moving inside me. He is God’s Son, and no man’s. He is my son too. I can’t explain it except to say it is real. It really happened. Believe me!”

This was a real test of Joseph’s faith. This was a real test of his love for God and Mary. Mary had taken Jesus into her and was now bearing him into the world, first to Joseph. Joseph must have been the first to hear it. What Mary told him demanded faith. He had to either believe or not believe her. “How can this be?” he must have thought. Joseph replaced his fear and uncertainty with faith. He chose to believe and to love Mary, both in his desire to not shame her and by his taking her into his home and marrying her. He cared for and protected Mary and her child.

Jesus comes into our world today through the sacraments. He comes today through the Church. Jesus also comes today through us. Indeed, he comes today just as certainly as he came back then. Will we have the faith and love of Joseph and Mary to accept him into our lives and bear him into the world?

He continues to come as innocent children needing love and acceptance and nurturing. He still comes wanting our acceptance, wanting to be taken into our homes, wanting us to believe.

He comes every day in the Mass, asking us to take him into our hearts, into our souls, even into our bodies by receiving him in Holy Communion.

He comes wanting our acceptance, wanting to be taken into our lives, to be possesed by us. The question is do we have the faith? His coming always demands a faith response, like it required of Joseph and Mary.

At this very moment he is asking you to accept him, believe in him, to change your lives, to be converted, to be purified from all sin, to ask for forgiveness, to be courageous and put aside any fear you may have. He is asking you to stop condemning yourself and others, to rid yourself of any hatred in your heart. He is asking you to embrace the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession, to embrace the Church, to embrace his mother, Mary.

Why does he ask this of us? As the Gospel said, “She will bear a son… because he will save his people from their sins.” He asks us this to save us from own sins and so that others may come to know of the forgiveness of their sins by us bringing him into their lives.

Jesus is coming soon. He comes to evoke in us a faith response, a “yes” response like Mary’s¸and a great love like St. Joseph. He wants us to care for him, possess him, treasure him, protect and nurture him like Mary. Like Mary, we are to bear him into the world, prepare a pure heart for him, a clean home for him by receiving the Sacrament of Penance and then receiving him worthily in Holy Communion.

We bear Jesus in our bodies when we receive him in Holy Communion. We must receive him worthily! He must bear him. We must be able to tell other what he has done for us. We must tell them he is real. We must ask to believe that he has come into our live and will come into theirs’ also.

Do we have the faith needed to do this? Do we have the love?

Do not be afraid to accept Jesus into your hearts, your bodies, and your homes this Christmas.