

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS*** 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT (B)

2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 14a,16 Psalm 89 Romans 16: 25-27 Luke 1: 26-38  
by Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Our second reading today is the closing of Paul's letter to the Romans. The passage is a doxology, and such prayers are common in our liturgical celebrations. Both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures frequently break out in doxologies. The word "doxa" is usually translated as "glory." The scriptures give glory when God's power and holiness shine through people and events.

Doxologies are our prayerful responses to the experience of God in our lives. When we perceive that God's splendor— we give glory. Sometimes God's glory comes in a cloud or shines forth in the Temple (cf. Ex. 29: 43; Numbers 16:19; Isaiah 6; and many psalms). When we behold God's glory we profess a doxology: "Glory to God" – "Praise God," etc. Note the number of times we use "glory," or similar words of praise, in today's eucharistic celebration..

In Romans, Paul has emphasized God's glory shining forth in Christ's life, death and resurrection. When we come to faith and perceive that glory we, in turn, give glory to God. In response to the mystery of God revealed in Christ, the Holy Spirit stirs up praise in us, helping us put into words what is inexplicable. In the gospel stories people break out spontaneously into doxologies when they encounter God's glory in Christ's words and works. At our Christmas midnight liturgy, we will hear the Luke's narration of the appearance of the heavenly hosts to the shepherds. The angels will shine with the "glory of the Lord" and will give praise to God (Luke 2:14) for what God is doing in the birth of the savior.

Frequently in his letters Paul will break out in a doxology (e.g. Eph. 3: 20-21; Phil: 2: 5-11) as he does today in his closing words in Romans. In the letter Paul has given us a glimpse into God's power and mercy manifested in Jesus. He encourages us to reflect on and recognize for ourselves God's wonderful works of grace in our own lives and then to give glory to God. Our responsibility, he tells us (Rom 12 ff.) is to live lives that reflect the glory we have received through Christ. In other words, our very lives should become a doxology as we "glorify God in our human bodies" (1 Cor. 6: 19).

Thus, the letter to the Romans ends as it began (1:2-5) proclaiming God's plan of salvation which the prophets promised and was fulfilled in Christ – a plan now

made known through Paul's "proclamation of Jesus Christ," now "made know to all nations." Give glory to God because God has reached out to save all humanity (and creation itself) through Christ.

The gospel scene that announces the coming birth of the savior has been frequently portrayed. The Renaissance artist Fra Angelico has a lovely painting of the Annunciation which now hangs in San Marco's museum in Florence. The museum was a Dominican priory and Fra Angelico painted religious themes on the cell walls of the friars, especially the novices, to help them contemplate and study the mysteries of faith. In the painting Mary is seated on a wooden bench in a portico. Her demeanor is peaceful and her garments neat. There is sunlight and the angel is magnificent! Much in the scene would encourage a life of quiet and prayer. But, while we don't live in the same setting as those friars did, still there is Fra Angelico's painting can still a restless soul and open us to the mystery of God – if only for a few moments in a hectic life.

But there is something else suggested in this gospel today – and it isn't so peaceful. Notice the opening verses. The angel is sent "to a town in Galilee called Nazareth." Sounds harmless enough, doesn't it? But Galilee was a troublesome place, where the vast majority of the people were very poor peasants. In Galilee, insurrections and nationalism frequently bubbled to the surface. Galileans were a suspect people and their land a place where people struggled for freedom. It was in Galilee that God chose to take flesh; Jesus was a Galilean.

Mary lived in a troubled land. What was she doing before the angel Gabriel arrived? Fra Angelico has her tranquilly seated, as if she were meditating. Some painters have her kneeling on the floor in a prayerful position. But maybe she was kneading bread, stitching clothes or trying to start a cooking fire. Perhaps she had been at her door and heard rumors of still one more insurrection in her land. We certainly don't want Mary's life to seem artificial, or foreign to what we moderns experience. We don't want to abstract her from our similar daily experiences and concerns.

One more look at the passage shows that "she was greatly troubled" at Gabriel's announcement. And "she pondered what sort of greeting this might be." The angel has to quickly reassure her, "do not be afraid." She must have been afraid! Mary's Galilee was a conflicted land, and her responses show her own inner confusion and doubt. But she doesn't get a road map from the angel to clear up the present and tell her where the future would take her. Instead, she must make room for God in her life and trust. Which is what we must do too, when we say our own "yes" to God.

## ADVENT PRAYER BEFORE READING THE SCRIPTURES

Sustain us, O God, on our Advent journey  
as we go forth to welcome  
the One who is to come.

Plant within our hearts your living Word of promise,  
and make hast to help us as we seek to understand  
what we went out to see in the Advent wilderness:  
your patience nurturing your saving purpose  
to fulfillment,  
your power in Jesus making all things new.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever Amen.

—from, AT HOME WITH THE WORD, 2008: SUNDAY SCRIPTURES AND  
SCRIPTURE INSIGHTS. Margaret N. Ralph, et al. (Chicago: Liturgy Training  
Publications, 2007, Paper, ISBN 978-1-56854-613-1, Page 14,

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available:

**“First Impressions Preaching Reflections: Liturgical Year B.”** Begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

**“Liturgical Years A, B and C.”** Reflections on the three-year cycle, with **Year B** updated.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy. You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: [www.preacherexchange.com](http://www.preacherexchange.com) and clicking on the “First Impressions” CD link on the left.

2. **“Homilias Dominicales”** —These Spanish reflections on the Sunday and daily scriptures are written by Dominican sisters and friars. If you or a friend would like to receive these reflections [Click Here](#).

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews, daily homilies and other material pertinent to preaching.

4. “First Impressions” is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Dominican Friars of Raleigh, N.C. If you would like “First Impressions” sent weekly to a friend, send a note to fr. John Boll, OP at the above email address.

## **DONATIONS**

If you would like to support this ministry, please go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thank you and “blessings on your preaching”,  
Jude Siciliano, O.P., [FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org).