

## “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

Dear Preachers:

My reflections this week are focused on the first and third readings. I see a strong contrast between them, the all-too-human plans of the human, here represented by David and the plans of God, which seem to defy human logic and strategy.

David wants to build a suitable house for God. The people have settled in and their enemies have been overcome. David is in a fine palace and figures God should have the same. The ark of God is dwelling in a tent. The clue that something different is planned is that fact--- God is in a tent. The tent was the meeting place of God with the People in their desert wanderings. It is a humble dwelling, not fixed, like a palace and a sign of the wandering nomads of the desert, a socially inferior people. God is present in the tent and thus to the social outcasts. The temple would come to symbolize a more stable religion, a grand religion, a religion of a people who "have it made." The tent had been the place of encounter with God in the desert.

David would not get to build this temple, but his son Solomon would. Was it because David was the man of war and his son one of peace? What kind of person gets to build a suitable worship place for God? Is a worship place built by the powerful? Solomon's name is closely related to the word "shalom." Notice too that the promise of a lasting kingdom is made not to David but to his son. This will be a reign of peace lead by one whose name is close to "shalom."

The human (David) in the story is flushed with power and decides to build a temple. He is taking the initiative, he will design it, determine its entrances and where its holiest place will be. If he is like other humans in charge of religion, he will probably also decide who gets in and through which entrances----who has access and who is denied access. He and other humans will decide what is the acceptable sacrifice to be offered in this temple and who will be authorized to perform these sacrifices. Notice when God starts to speak how many "I statements" there are. "I will fix...I will plant...I will give...etc." God is making it clear who is in charge and reminding David of what God has done, lest he think it was by his and the people's own power, that they got to this state of well-being. The people are also likely to think that it was by their own attractiveness that made them

chosen by God.

David must not forget where he came from, he was a shepherd and anointed at God's behest. David can't pay God back for being their God; God doesn't need the reward of being their God. We, not God, are on the receiving end of gifts. God says it quite clearly, "the Lord also reveals to you that (God) will establish a house for you." David wants to build a house for God and instead, God wants to build a house for the people, a permanent house and one according to God's own designs. Remember that this is the tent-dwelling-God speaking and so we can expect that this God will build a house for a similar kind of people. God chose to be with the Israelites through their terrible sojourn in the desert, and so God will not stay in a fixed place but travel with us in our travail, move with us through each stage of our lives, not abandon us in the desert days of our lives. God will "pitch a tent" among us, move with us, take flesh with us.

This is God's plan, promised to David and begun to be realized in our Gospel story today. The angel goes to one who is betrothed, to one of the house of David. Now we will see the house of the Lord take the design and shape God planned for it. God comes to dwell again among the poor and the ones on the fringe---- "to a town in Galilee," a place of outsiders, a long way from the Temple in Jerusalem. Mary's wonderment captures our own today, for what we thought God might have done is not what God decides to do. God is designing this temple, this dwelling place of God in our midst and it doesn't look like anything we might have expected. The house has gone from the hands of the warrior to the womb of the maiden. So, God is the designer of this dwelling place, and it has nothing to do with David's plans and everything to do with God's. God is the chief character in this story and, as with all the other biblical stories, it is about grace. This God of power is a God of grace. Christmas has everything to do with gifts, not the kind we buy and provide for ourselves, but the Gift that God provides for us, one that lasts forever. All human achievement is absent from our biblical stories today, only God's achievement is present. And to all this Mary says, "Let it be done to me as you say."

#### QUOTABLE:

Advent makes a place for seers on the saints' days of the Christian calendar. Visionaries are among the most valued members of the biblical communities. They save us from myopia. They are our "critics-in-residence" (Donald Michael). These faithful futurists have seen the Not Yet and want us to do something about

it in the Now.

Advent, therefore, means preparation. It calls us to attention before what and who is to come. For the Just One there shall be justice. For the realm of Shalom hereafter there shall be peacemakers here. We make ready for the Liberator by acts of liberation Now, and we prepare for the Reconciler as agents of reconciliation Now. To those who work and pray toward these visions, and live by their grace, the benedictory Word is addressed: "May the God peace sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." (I Thess. 5: 23-24).

"Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary."  
ed. Dieter T. Hessel, page 38.

A Poem:

MARY, MARY

What else did the Angel tell you?  
While you nurtured his message  
And pondered the wild potential  
Of a womb, did you envision those  
Who would come after, the generations  
That would Balkanize your heart,  
Stamp your image on their banners  
And lead you into battle:  
That the wind would carry your name  
From a German Soldier's lips  
As he lay dying on the Eastern front,  
A Polish captain would wear your medal  
Up the heights of Monte Cassino?  
Do you grow weary of false sightings  
And forced tears, the rote of rosaries,  
The bargains of Novenas?

Oh, Lady of Guadalupe,  
Madonna of Czestochowa,  
Queen of Patriarchs,  
Mystical Rose,  
Do you sometimes long to cry out

To the complaining Daughters of Eve,  
To the rapacious Sons of Adam:  
“Stop, Be silent. Listen, Hear me.  
I’m Miriam, the Jewish girl of Nazareth  
Who said “yes” to life.”

By Alice Tarnowski, in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. ([FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org))

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Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P.

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