

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Year C: Mi 5:1-4a; Ps 80; Heb 10:5-10; Lk 1:39-45
December 19, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

The fourth candle of the Advent wreath is lit. But it's not Christmas yet. We have almost another full week of Advent, to get ourselves ready to celebrate Our Lord's birth at Christmas. And on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church asks us to reflect on the visitation of Mary to her cousin, Elizabeth.

The Visitation is the second Joyful Mystery of the Holy Rosary. It's a beautiful scene from the Gospel, when Mary visits Elizabeth to rejoice in the good news that each of them had received. Right after the angel appeared to Mary, to announce that she would be the Mother of God, she set out in haste to visit Elizabeth. For, the angel had also told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived in her old age and was already in her sixth month (cf. Lk 1:36).

Mary, no doubt, wanted to go help Elizabeth; for, pregnancy could not have been easy, especially in old age. But Mary probably also wanted to go speak with Elizabeth about what she had just heard from the angel. She probably wanted to speak with Elizabeth about the great events that were unfolding in her life. Mary must have felt that it was safe to discuss these matters with Elizabeth, who had also received and experienced the miracle of conceiving a child in her old age. Mary must have been eager to share her thoughts and feelings about everything that was suddenly happening in her life. She probably wanted to speak with Elizabeth about the revelation to her that the ancient prophecies promising a Messiah were finally being fulfilled, such as the one we heard in the first reading today from the prophet Micah: *"You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne"*

The Visitation reminds us that when we receive consolations or insights from God, whether in our prayer or from events in our daily lives, these gifts from above are often given to motivate us to reach out to others, as Mary did when she travelled in haste to Elizabeth. Mary had received some "inside information" – that the world's redemption was finally about to begin, and she set out right away to share this good news with her cousin, Elizabeth. In the same way, when we experience blessings in our lives, or insights and consolations from God, it may be God's intention that we share these blessings with others. As one spiritual

reflection on the Visitation puts it, “The human heart can only hold just so much of joy and sorrow, and after it is full, the contents spill over into the lives of those around it” (Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P., MAGNIFICAT meditation for December 19, 2021). Mary’s heart was full of wonder and awe at what was happening, and she needed to share this joy with another. After she greeted Elizabeth, Mary sang her Magnificat, when she said, “*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior*” (Lk 1:46-47). She was allowing the joy God had given her to overflow to others.

That’s a lesson from the Gospel for us. Our faith and our relationship with God should have an effect in the world. At a minimum, it should have an effect on our other relationships and on the people in our lives. At a minimum, our faith should influence our families and our friendships. It should be something that we share with others. When people do allow their faith to influence their relationships and their conversations, when they share with others how God is acting in their lives, they usually feel more authentic, more complete and more fulfilled. “*For the love of Christ impels us,*” as St. Paul says, that once we come to the conviction that “*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,*” we become “*ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us,*” to share this good news with others (2Cor 5:14, 19, 20).

So, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, when we reflect on Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth, we should think about how we can allow our faith to overflow to others – how we can reach out to others when we experience blessings in our lives, so that those blessings benefit others, as well. This is something that certainly happens in material ways, especially at Christmas, when Christians are motivated by charity to help others in need. But it is also something that should happen *spiritually*, when we share with others the consolations and insights we receive from our faith, especially when these insights can help to sustain others who might need to be strengthened in their own faith, so that they can come to a deeper understanding of the love of God. The best Christmas gift that any of us could ever give others is to help them deepen their own faith in Christ who was born into our world to save us.