

4th Sunday of Advent 2011 – Montesino Sermon

The major theme of today's scripture reading is not about David or about Mary. It is about God's presence with us throughout all of history, the wonderful things that God has done in our midst. David is reminded that God lived in the midst of the people as they traveled through the desert. The Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's presence was carried in a tent. Wherever they went God was there. The tent was the meeting place between God and humanity. God dwelt among a poor and nomadic people. Any success that David experienced was the work of God. It is not David but God who will give the people peace.

In the Gospel, Gabriel announces to Mary God is with her. The story begins with God's action of tremendous love for humanity. Mary is filled with grace, highly favored one. She responds with trust and faith in the unknown. Mary has no idea what the future will bring. God will become one of us born of a simple peasant girl. The Gospel of John puts it this way – ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”***

Translated literally from the Greek, this says ***God pitched his tent*** among us. God is not stationary. God is with each one of us wherever we are. Every human person is filled with the dignity of God.

That brings us to the preaching of the early Dominicans in the Americas exactly 500 years ago on the 4th Sunday of Advent 1511. But let us back up to the beginning of the story in 1508. Tomás Cayetano, Master of the Dominican Order signed a decree sending 15 Dominicans to various parts of the Americas.

The first four sailed from Avila and arrived in Santo Domingo in September of 1510. Pedro de Cordoba, 28 years old, was the superior. He was accompanied by Antonio de Montesino, Bernard de Santo Domingo, and Domingo de Villamayor. Their primary preaching was not in words. They preached by their lives. They chose to live a life of poverty in the midst of the native people. Their convent was a hut made of palm branches which was also a church and a study. The order thus, planted itself among the people – “lived in a tent” so to speak. Secondly they learned the language and customs of the people and came to reverence their lives. They loved the humble, simple natives. Finally, they preached as a community and their words flowed from their communal study. Together they sat by an oil lamp, reflected on their experience and love of the people, and wrote their sermons. Word was sent out to the colonizers that a special sermon would be preached on the 4th Sunday of Advent and all came. Antonio de Montesino proclaimed a sermon prepared by the community. It was signed by all four and his voice has rung out through the centuries. The following day they were condemned by the Governor Diego de Colon, brother of Columbus, and the other Spanish colonists. The friars continued to preach justice over and over.

Today their words still speak to us and Dominicans all over this country are proclaiming the same word on this 4th Sunday. **So I speak the words of the early friars to you. They are not easy words. I quote:**

I am the voice of Christ in the desert of this island. Therefore, it is fitting that you listen to this voice, not with careless attention, but with all your heart and senses.

This voice will be the strangest that you have ever heard, the harshest and hardest, most lasting voice that you will ever hear.

This voice cries out that you are all in mortal sin because of the cruelty and tyranny that you practice among these innocent peoples. Tell me by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such horrible servitude. “Con qué derecho???” Y con qué justicia???” On what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these peoples, who dwelt peacefully and quietly on their own land? Wars by which you destroyed infinite numbers of them by murders and slaughters never before heard of? Why do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of sicknesses they acquire through excessive labor? They die; rather you kill them, in order to acquire gold...

Are they not human beings? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? Don't you understand this? Don't you feel this?

What do these words say to us today? What is our experience? We live in a world filled with people who are hungry and impoverished, a world where people die daily through violence. Who will speak for them? What are the sins of our society? Right here in Adrian there are hundreds of homeless people, people without jobs, people who are sick and lonely. We read about robberies and murders in the Daily Telegram. Are they not human beings? On the broader scene, there are wars in every part of the globe and our country is involved in many of them.

In Mexico, thousands of people are murdered daily by the drug cartels fighting to sell their drugs in the U.S. Kidnappings, rapes, trafficking of men, women, and children cry out for a voice to speak today in their name. Are they not human beings?

Immigrants have fled to our country in search of a better life. Many are not welcomed and they live in constant fear of being picked up. Are they not human beings? Will the common good of all people and the human dignity of every person be in the forefront as we prepare for elections?

Enough, we could all go on and on with the problems. I also want to be a voice of hope. Your community does respond – the dire needs program, the food pantry, helping with share the warmth, tithing, and I know you could list many more things. On a broader scale, every place where there is injustice and violence there are also groups working for justice & peace. No one of us can do everything. But every one can do something. As a community we can do more than any one of us could do alone. So let us challenge ourselves to be a voice in our world today and remember that God is always with us.