

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Three brothers, Johnny, Tommy and Charlie, are writing letters to Santa Claus

Johnny writes: "Dear Santa, in my house there are three boys. Charlie is 10, Tommy is 8. And Johnny is 6. Charlie is good sometimes. Tommy is good sometimes. And Johnny is good all the time". -- (Signed) Johnny.

Tommy writes: "Dear Santa: Last year you didn't leave me anything good. The year before last year, you didn't leave me anything good. I am now 8 years old. This might be your last chance." -- (Signed) Tommy

Ten-year old Charlie has begun to doubt whether Santa is real and so decides to write directly to Baby Jesus instead, just to be sure. This is how he begins his letter: "Dear Jesus, you know I was a very good boy this year ..." The argument does not sound too convincing to him, so he tears the paper and begins afresh.

"Dear Jesus, you know I TRIED to be a very good boy this year ..." Again, this does not sound too convincing either. Again he tears the paper to begin afresh.

Just then Charlie looks up at the statue of Mary in the nativity scene, goes and grabs it and carefully wraps it up in a sheet. Then he settles to write his final letter: "Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again ...."

This Fourth Sunday of Advent our attention is focused on our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Saviour. In fact the Gospel reading from St Luke tells us about her visit to Elizabeth, her older cousin.

Mary and Elizabeth are bursting with anticipation, with expectation. Mary is a young girl, newly married, with a baby announced by an angel and conceived miraculously. Elizabeth is an older woman, one who thought her chance to have a child had passed. Her baby, conceived naturally, was also announced by an angel, the same angel in fact, Gabriel. The women know that not just their lives will be changed, but the world will be changed. They greet each other, and the baby within Elizabeth, the future John the Baptist, recognizes the presence of the Messiah within Mary. Elizabeth is overwhelmed with excitement as she realizes that her child would have a vital role in God's plan for His people. Both women proclaim their gratitude to God for working His wonders within them.

Perhaps, as a final preparation for Christmas, we can spend a few moments reflecting on the great Gift God has given us and focus on the gratitude we owe Him. The great gift of Christmas, of course, is the gift of His Son. The Christian philosopher Kierkegaard told a parable to help explain this gift.

Once upon a time there was a king who was rich and powerful. The King was very unhappy, though. He wanted a wife to be his queen. Now a political marriage could easily have been arranged with another country but that is not what the King wanted. He wanted someone whom he could love and who could love him. Only real love could fill his vast, empty castle and life.

One day the King was riding through the streets of a small village in a remote corner of the kingdom when he came upon the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He immediately fell in love with her. But there was a problem: she was a peasant girl. The problem was that he wanted to win her love, not buy her love.

One of his counsellors told him to just command her to be his wife. Any girl, especially a peasant girl, would jump at the opportunity. But the King would not do that. He could not command love. Besides, for the rest of his life he would wonder if she was a loving wife or a loyal subject.

Another counsellor told the king to that he should call on the girl as her King, shower her with presents of diamonds and gold and silk gowns, and give her the opportunity to realize that he truly loved her. But the King would not do that. For the rest of his life he would wonder if she loved him or his wealth.

A third counsellor told the king to dress as a peasant so she would not be overwhelmed, and gradually reveal his power and position until she was ready to join him in the castle. The king did not like the thought of deceiving her. If their relationship was based on deception, how could she ever love him?

Finally, the King knew what he would do. He renounced his royal robes, his power and authority. He became a peasant in that remote village, living and working and suffering beside the other peasants. After a number of years,

he won the heart of the beautiful young girl. He took his new wife to another village in another country, where no one could have guessed who he was. After many years, he became sick, and wife loved him and cared for him. He died a peasant, but at his funeral the people looked at his wonderful, caring and in many ways extremely beautiful wife and said, "That man married a queen."

God is the King. He is the Divine Lover. We are the object of His love. Only God would love so much that He would become one of us to win our love. St. Irenaeus, an early doctor of the Church, wrote, "Because of his great love for us, Jesus, the Word of God, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself."

This is the mystery that excites us. It is the same mystery that excited Mary and Elizabeth. They realized that they had each in their own way been chosen to be vehicles of God's plan of love. Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, would point to this Love become flesh. Jesus, Mary's son, would be this love. We also have been chosen to be part of this plan by the One who loves us and who calls us to make His Love a reality for others.

With deep gratitude during these final days of Advent we pray that Lord will come to us so we can come to him. That as he has become physical so we can become spiritual. That as he has embraced us with his Love so we can embrace others with his love. We thank him for choosing us to be part of his plan. We thank him for allowing us to join Mary and Elizabeth in the excitement of his Coming Presence. We ask him now to give us the strength and the courage to proclaim his Presence with our lives.

There might be only a few days left, but: Happy Advent, everyone!

