

**Homily for the
Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Fr. Raphael Simon, O.C.S.O.
December 23, 1984
St. Joseph's Abbey
Spencer, Massachusetts**

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. This is a time of great expectation.

The three readings tell us of this expectation. The first promises to David a house, a kingdom, and a throne that will endure forever. But where is the Davidic dynasty, the Davidic kingdom and throne?

The second tells of a mystery hidden for many ages, now to be revealed – the mystery of this throne that will endure forever.

The third reveals to us the mystery. The Davidic throne that will last forever is the throne of the Son of David, the Son of God. It is Jesus who reigns on the throne of David and rules over the house of Jacob forever. This house we are, we the mystical body of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church. This mystery is known to those who, as St. Paul says in the second reading, believe and obey – however few – or many – they may be.

Now this is only part of the mystery which has been revealed. There is a deeper mystery which is even less known. It is fitting today, on the brink of the birth of this King who comes, to speak of it. Jesus is born to us. He is born for us.

What does this mean? It means He comes to redeem us, yes. He comes to forgive us, yes. But He also comes to dwell in us, and to transform us into Himself, to make of us a new creation. I say this is less known, because it is only really known by those who are willing to change, to go on changing, to become a new creation.

Think for a moment of his coming at the moment of his birth to Mary and Joseph. There we see in the fullest sense what it means that Jesus is born to us. He is born to Mary and Joseph. He is their son. He is theirs. Mary looks at this beautiful face, full of love for her, of compassion for us, at his beautiful hands, held out to her. Dare I pat them? Dare I kiss them? The hands, the face of God? Yes, I do, for He is mine. Mary looks at Joseph, and she reads in his eyes that he feels all that she feels. They are together man and wife, sharing together a divine

child who belongs to them, to whom they give themselves completely. This is what it means that Jesus is born to them, for them, He is theirs.

But is He not also ours? He said that he who does the will of his Father is his mother and brother and sister. Does He really mean it? Yes, He means exactly what He says. The mystery of the Holy Family is just this, that the Church is the extension of the Holy Family. And we who do the Father's will are his mother and brother and sister. And who are they who do the will of the Father? What is the Father's will? Those do the will of the Father who are faithful to the vocation He has given them, who are seeking in that vocation – and not outside it – personal holiness to which all are called by his birth, by his being given to us. Our vocation is to be lay people, or priests or monks or sisters; mothers, fathers, children. We are truly his mother, and so also his human father; we are Mary and Joseph. And so the child who is born is born to us as He is born to Mary and Joseph. He is born to us through having been born to Joseph and Mary. Through them we learn his doctrine is truth in its simplicity and in its depth and in its holiness, and we become one with Jesus and a new creation.

Now what is the consequence of this for our lives? If we are Mary and Joseph, we must nourish the divine child, foster his growth, guard Him from his enemies.

We do this in two ways. Jesus is his Church and we must feed his Church by our prayers, our example, our works, so that the faithful will be increased in number and holiness, so that the ends of the world will come to know Him who comes for them as well as for us.

And Jesus is ourselves, our own soul. It depends on our free will whether we nourish Jesus in our souls, make Him grow by the practice of his virtues – charity, obedience, meekness, humility, giving ourselves to others, helping others. It depends on us whether we guard Him by turning from our soul those temptations which would expose Jesus in our souls to danger, to possible destruction, which would lead us from fidelity to our vocations as Christians – grievances against others, broken relationships, unforgiveness. Likewise we expose Jesus in our souls to danger by not resisting temptations against the particular lifestyle of our vocation, by infidelity of spouses to each other, of members of communities to their community, by failure to accept the responsibilities of our particular vocation.

Why is this so important? Because the will of the Father is manifest to us in our vocation, and it is only therein that we can pursue personal holiness, the holiness to which we are called, which is the Father's will for us. Only those who do the will of the Father are his mother and brother and sister. They alone will at one

and the same time, make Jesus to grow in their souls in his Church, in humankind. We are all called to believe and obey, through that love which the Holy Spirit who is given to us pours forth in our souls, and in a particular way at Christmas when Jesus is born to us. If we believe and obey, we will know in love the truth, the truth of doctrine, the truth the Church teaches and we will stand tall and straight in the true faith of yesterday, today, and yes, the faith of tomorrow – for tomorrow belongs to Jesus and to his Church.

This is the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of the new creation, our great expectation, the mystery of a child born to us and for us, whom we are called to become.