

Dec. 24, 2023

Our sermons in Advent 2023 are taken from the collects of the day and an Advent hymn.

During Advent Ellen, Rhett, and I have built our sermons around
either the Collect of the Day or a special Advent hymn.

Today's sermon comes from our Collect of the Day,
but first...let's talk about Mary.

A lot of our religious imagination has focused on Mary
over the last 2,000 years, and not just Roman Catholics.

Every expression of Christianity quite rightly thinks about,
honors, and tries to emulate Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Some of this comes from necessity.

Because "Father" and "Son" are two of the many names given
to the first and second persons of the Trinity,
our own imagination rightly hungers for ways to express
the divine feminine.

Of course, Mary is NOT divine; her humanity is the whole point.

But she represents a special kind of faithfulness
and in our unconscious religious longings,
she can become a kind of symbol of the divine feminine.

When I find myself in time of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me....

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Over the centuries we've called on different aspects of Mary's faithfulness
for different ages, and I think we also call on different parts of Mary
in different seasons of our own lives.

When we need to be brave, we remember how she met the angel Gabriel
and said yes to God's call.

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When we want to be prophetic, we sing her song in Luke - the Magnificat.

When we want to lift up innocence and purity,
we focus on her youth and her virginity.

When we want to lift up motherhood,
we focus on her protection and raising of Jesus.

And when we suffer we remember the sword that pierced her own soul, too,
her witness to the suffering and crucifixion of her son.

And of course we argue about what part of Mary's example
is right for whatever moment we find ourselves in.

(Mary, did you know?)

But that's a sermon for another time.

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Mary gives us multiple examples of faithfulness,
but she and ALL the saints do more than just show us
good examples in their own lives.

The saints show us something about the nature of Jesus.

The saint who forgives shows us something about Christ's forgiveness.

The saint who suffers shows us something about Christ's suffering,
and so on.

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Today, on this 4th Sunday of Advent, this Mary Sunday,
I want you to focus on one particular aspect of Christ
that Mary shows us.

And that's what brings us back to our collect for today.

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[8:00] We beseech thee, Almighty God, to purify our consciences
by thy daily visitation, that when thy Son our Lord cometh
he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself.

[10:30] Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation,
that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming,
may find in us a mansion prepared for himself.

When we pray this prayer we ask God the Father to purify us
so that God the Son will find in us a mansion prepared to receive him.

...So that Jesus will find in us a mansion prepared to receive him...

[rub belly) What image does that prayer call up?

Mary is known as the Theotokos, which is Greek for the God Bearer.

By saying yes to God and bearing within her own body
the person of Jesus, the Son of God,

Mary shows us the ultimate example
of Jesus finding us prepared to receive him.

What Mary experiences in this particular, physical way
we pray for God to let us experience in a universal, spiritual way:
we pray for God to help us receive
the real presence of Christ within us.

On this last Sunday of Advent, this eve of the Incarnation,
pray that following the example of Mary,
God would also make YOUR body,
would also make YOUR actual, physical, mental, & spiritual self,
a mansion prepared to receive the divine presence
of the Son of God.

Amen.