

NEW YEAR'S HOMILY
"Humble Faith – Key to the Kingdom"
(Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

Do you want to deepen your experience of the Kingdom of God?

Be like Mary – full of humble faith.

At Bethlehem we witness the scandal that God came into human history completely helpless, as a newborn. He could have come in power and glory, but instead slipped almost unnoticed into a small province in a forgotten corner of the world to a poor young couple, unwed or only recently married. There were no elaborate preparations for this birth – God was born on the road. The crib was a feeding trough, and those who came to visit were shepherds, not kings. By entering human history in this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor and the homeless. Among them, God could do divine work. A humility born of need is the necessary requirement for entry into this new kingdom.

The Christmas story tells the birth of a new king. Though the world was ruled by Caesar Augustus who was known as a peacemaker, real peace on earth would be realized only through the sovereignty of the child born in Bethlehem. The birth reveals a new world order, a world not under Caesar but under the direction of God's design for the redemption of all peoples. In this world, God's Word is heard by the humble. There is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the poor and the oppressed, and those who heard what God was doing were filled with joy. God has not forgotten us nor abandoned us in the brokenness that we have created for ourselves. The story of Christmas is, therefore, *both an announcement of hope, and a call to deep humility.*

Mary was above all an example of humble, obedient faith. She belonged to the poor of Jesus' day; the marginalized and the oppressed. She was at home in a stable and on a donkey, the lot of the very poor, even destitute. She welcomed animals and shepherds, the lowest of occupations, to the stable when Jesus was born. To be humble is to know who we are, our qualities as well as our defects, to be in touch with our true selves, to not wear masks or pretence. Mary was humble, and God was able to work in her as in no other. With humility like Mary's God will also work in us and we will be able to share how God is at work in us with the world.

Once I had an opportunity to experience a facilitated growth experience with a renewal group. We were shown a gym with ropes criss-crossing it at a height of about six feet. We were told that we would be blindfolded and given five minutes to find a key, without being allowed to talk with anyone. If someone found the key or got into any trouble, they were to raise their arm as a sign to the facilitator.

I started off following one rope, determined to be the first to find the key. After bumping into a couple other participants going in the opposite direction, I decided it could not be a

key taped to the rope. It must be a trick, or a puzzle – perhaps a key word. Given my experience with the Twelve Step program, I rather proudly put up my hand numerous times to offer my solutions – words such as “humility”, “cooperation”, “teamwork”, “helping each other.” None of my answers were right and suddenly the time was up. I was disappointed and somewhat frustrated.

As we debriefed the experience, we discovered that only one person had succeeded to find the key. He had run into a wall, and being rather emotional, started to cry. When asked if he was okay by a facilitator, he replied that he needed help. That was the key – asking for help. When I realized this, I felt ashamed and even afraid – here I was, teaching others how to go on healing journeys, yet I was unable to ask for help for myself. I was too proud. That awareness was a wake up call for me, a deep lesson in my own need to grow in humility, a humility that is the key to the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a meal that demands a lot of humble faith. Simple gifts of bread and wine, we believe, are transformed by the faith prayer of the presider and the community, into the very Body and Blood of Jesus, the humble one. And if we receive them with humble faith and repentance, then we are transformed into the Body of Christ, sent out into the world to be leaven and light to all.

So, to experience the kingdom of God, have faith and pray for humility.

