

Well here we are on December 24<sup>th</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, which also happens to be Christmas Eve, so we only have a few more hours to go until we formally celebrate Christmas in the Church and less than 11 hours to go until *TNT* and *TBS* air 24-hours of *A Christmas Story*, one of my all-time favorite movies, so we're movin' right along!

But just because we're so awkwardly close to Christmas, doesn't mean we're there yet. So since we have a few hours left before Christmas, what does our Heavenly Father want to tell us *right now* and what does He want to give us on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent?

Well in today's Gospel from Luke, we hear the beautiful account of the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, this young Jewish girl whom most theologians and scholars believe would've been around 14 years old at the time—and tells her that God has chosen her to be the Mother of our Savior—the Mother of Jesus, whose name in Hebrew literally means, “God saves.” Reading this Gospel account brings back so many great memories of my pilgrimage to Nazareth in northern Israel as a deacon 3 summers ago—a pilgrimage I'll never forget. Most especially, I'll never forget serving mass in the

Basilica of the Annunciation at the historic site of Mary's extremely small, humble home where today's Gospel took place.

While the Annunciation itself is so rich with meaning, at its core, we discover that our salvation began with a young teenage girl lovingly and humbly surrendering herself to the merciful and saving will of God. We see Mary, acting in perfect freedom, lovingly and faithfully embrace her *absolutely unique* vocation as the hand-picked Mother of God.

There are many more things one could say about the Annunciation, but what's so strikingly beautiful is to realize that we, the human race, were saved by a *totally unplanned, unexpected pregnancy*. While Mary was immaculately conceived and sinless, she wasn't omniscient, meaning that she wasn't all-knowing like God and therefore she didn't have any foreknowledge that she would be called to be the Mother of God nor did she immediately know what that role would fully entail or specifically mean for her and St. Joseph.

While at the time of the Annunciation, Mary may not have fully understood or known what the future held for her, she *still* freely embraced God's will and His great plan of salvation, trusting that He

would lovingly lead and guide Her through it all. In her free acceptance of God's plan for Her, our Blessed Mother Mary truly demonstrates that she is the model, *par excellence*, of faith, hope, and love.

There's a powerful declaration spoken by the Angel Gabriel during the Annunciation that certainly jumps out at me and I'm sure would've confirmed Mary's great faith and hope—the Angel Gabriel concludes his message to Mary saying: “*for nothing will be impossible for God.*”

Brothers and sisters, God our Father, the Creator of the universe, is *all-powerful* in that He can do all things that are in accordance with His nature of infinite, perfect love, goodness, and mercy. And the Good News is that our Heavenly Father greatly desires our holiness and salvation and therefore He will give us the grace that we need to *be holy* and to accept His gift of redemption.

Regardless of where we are in our lives, our Heavenly Father wants to remind us of something today on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent. Maybe at this point in life, some are in a very painful, dark place. Some may be growing weary in the journey of faith. Some may be growing tired in the pursuit of holiness and in carrying certain crosses. Some

may even be losing hope and finding it hard to love God and others.

Maybe some are struggling to overcome a particular sin.

Maybe some are struggling to forgive someone, struggling to let go of certain grudges, and be fully reconciled to another. Maybe some are trying to find healing for certain wounds and past hurts that seemingly won't go away. Maybe some are experiencing difficulties and challenges in a certain relationship, and may be finding it hard to love another person. Maybe some are struggling with an addiction and striving to live in freedom, but are losing hope that such freedom is possible. Maybe some are praying for the conversion of a loved one and hoping that they will return to the Church and come back to the faith, but at the same don't see any positive change or progress in that regard.

*Whatever it may be*, in the midst of all of these challenges, crosses, and struggles, today *all of Heaven* resoundingly and lovingly echoes to us the beautiful words of the Angel Gabriel from the Annunciation:

***“nothing will be impossible for God!”*** In other words, ***“Don't give up!***

***Don't lose faith! Don't give up hope!”*** The Lord wants to lovingly

reassure us today that ***“My grace is sufficient for you!”*** Brothers and

sisters, our Heavenly Father will *never* give up on us, therefore we should *never* give up on Him, *nor* should we give up on others in our life! Rather, we need to respond to God's grace and courageously persist in prayer, and persevere in faith, hope, and love.

Advent and Christmas are about hope, possibilities, and potential—the possibilities that emerge from our obedient and humble surrender to Christ our Savior! In Christ and in His Blessed Mother, we see our great potential as human beings! *With Christ, all things are possible!* Brothers and sisters, sometimes, it's only when we hit rock-bottom, when we are in the depths of utter darkness, despair, misery, and suffering, do we then fully realize and come to understand *who Jesus truly is* as our Savior. *He is the one* Who was sent into the depths of our own personal darkness to rescue us and bring us to the Light.

So today on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent with just a few hours to go until Christmas, as we prepare to encounter Christ our Hope in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us remember the Heavenly words of the Angel Gabriel in today's Gospel: *“For nothing will be impossible for God.”*