

Homily 4th Sunday in Advent 2021

Isn't it strange that the people whose memory remain in your mind even after scores of years are the humble and not the great? In the early 70s I met two such people whose example I will never forget. Padre Amato Dagnino and Sorella Marisa. Father Dagnino was my Rector in The Major Seminary, a prominent theologian and an extremely holy man. For all his status and qualifications he appeared a simple, and almost anonymous individual treating the students with a servant style of leadership, never losing his temper but encouraging and understanding in all matters relating to the overseeing of over 120 young men in their twenties and early thirties. He was gentle, humble of heart and always available to listen with understanding and compassion. Sr Marisa was the Superior of the Sisters who worked in the kitchen and laundry. She, like Fr Dagnino, was highly qualified as were some of the other sisters, but she went about her mission of service with serenity and obedience. Both these religious would have made extraordinary parents because they relied not on their own intellect but the wisdom of God through prayer.

In today's First Reading Bethlehem, the LEAST of the cities of Judah, is named as the place of The Messiah's birth. Not the sophisticated capital Jerusalem, The Temple City, but little lowly Bethlehem. Not the better-known cities like the lush temperate Jericho but a simple backwater whose only claim to fame was it was the City of King David.

In the Second Reading to The Hebrews St Paul pleads with the community to stop relying on sacrificial offerings, holocausts and oblations for sins and realise that the humble Lamb of God has been offered once and for all to take away the sins of the world. Jesus, the lamb without blemish humbled himself to be like us and being as we are humbled himself more to accepting death and what's more death on a Cross.

The theme of humility continues in The Gospel when Mary thinks not of herself but of her elderly cousin Elizabeth who is also with child through the power of God. Elizabeth is also a humble servant of God and immediately greets Mary: 'Of all women you are the most blessed and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Why should I be honoured by a visit from the mother of My Saviour?' Mary, in all humility replies: My soul glorifies The Lord. He looks on His Servant in her NOTHINGNESS henceforth all ages will call me blessed. He raises the LOWLY and fills the starving with good things.'

Mary, the Mother of God, was hailed as the most famous woman of all time by the secular publication The National Geographical Magazine. Her global standing lies in her humility and willingness to do God's will.