

## 4th Week of Advent - A Time to Trust Without Reservation

### Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Hello, I'm Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, and let us begin our time together in prayer.

#### Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, Amen. God, our Heavenly Father, we anticipate the coming of your Son into the world. Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. We also want our Lord to ransom and hold captive all those things that separate us from his love, that separates us from you. Please fill us with a deeper reception of your Holy Spirit, that we may become witnesses of your love to the world. In this season of anticipation, please, Lord, help us to deal with some of the stress and the anxiety, the hopelessness, the despair, the heartbreak that we may be experiencing, the challenges in our lives right now, in our family's life, in the lives of our children. Lord, let the light of your peace that penetrated the sky that first Christmas night with angels and the heavenly hosts.

Lord, let that light that peace shine into our lives, shine into our hearts, shine into our homes this season. Help us to adequately prepare to make room for your love to work, to flow freely through our witness, through our example so that others may see, when they see us, they experience the power of your love. Lord, we ask this in humility, and we ask this with peace through Christ our Lord, Amen. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

#### God Reaches Out to Us

This season of advent, we look with anticipation and longing for Emmanuel, right? For God with us. We are sometimes filled with doubt and anxiety. We lose faith and we place our hope into things of this world. But it's precisely in the wondrous signs from God, the word becoming flesh, and His choice to dwell among us. He's reaching out to us and touching us with His life and with His gift of peace that assures us that we are not alone in our struggle. And I love that. That when God first wanted to reach out to us, He did so through, in the Old Testament, through great kings, and prophets, and rulers, and great men and women of the Bible like Abraham, and Moses, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Ruth, right? And Esther and so many others.

You know, but now God no longer wanted to work through human beings. He wanted to become one of us, so the word became flesh as it tells us in the prologue of John's Gospel, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. He wanted to touch us with His own hands. He wanted to love us with His own heart. He wanted to see us with His own eyes. He wanted personal relationship. And that's how much He loves us. It's almost like He couldn't stand to be away from us. You know, He wanted to come, especially to bring salvation into the world to show us that not even sin and death are more powerful than His love, than His life, than His truth. The Lord has not

forsaken the house of David, and this child is born of a virgin is a sign of God's favor and faithfulness, and the depth of His love for each and every one of us.

## **Make Room in Our Hearts for Him**

You know, Psalm 24, which is one of my favorites is called the in invitatory psalm, along with Psalms 95, Psalms 67, and Psalm 100. These are often prayed at the beginning of the Divine Office, the Liturgy of the Hours, as an invitation to prayer, as a calling to prayer, right? As a way of opening our minds and our hearts more deeply to the experience of God they're going to have during that particular time of prayer. And it also anticipates the coming of Christ. David write in there in Psalm 24, *"O gates, lift high your heads, grow higher ancient doors, let him enter, the King of Glory."*

So of course, he's not talking just about the gates of Jerusalem, right? He's talking about the gates of our hearts, opening the gates and allowing God's love to flow in, allowing God's love to give us our lives purpose and meaning to allow space in our hearts for God's holy will to transform our lives, right? That's really what David is getting at in that incredibly beautiful psalm.

We have to make room in our hearts for the King of the Universe, right? To dwell there and allow that love to shape us. Just like you know, kids take Play-Doh, and they mold it, and shape it. You know, we have to be malleable in God's hands, right? So that He can form us and shape us according to His will. We have to willingly and lovingly allow Him to trust Him, that in that shaping, that makes us more in accord with His mind, and accord with His heart, and accord with His will, that we can truly become the men and the women that He calls each one of us to be.

## **St. Paul's Gospel**

Now, St. Paul preaches the gospel of the true Lord and king of heaven and earth, right? Because sometimes, we place ourselves in the false gods of the culture, right? We put our trust in, you know, maybe leaders, or things, or possessions, or money, or something else. And we sometimes forget, you know, who's the true king of our lives, right? In fact, that's one of the reasons for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, right? God wanted to put a physical reminder to our first parents that He is God and we are not. So even though he puts us in charge, right? He makes the stewards of His creation, that God is ultimately the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So the tree is a physical reminder to the man, I'm God and you are not, right?

And so often the phrase used for the successor of David, the Messianic King who is to come, is Son of Man. Now, we know of course, that Jesus is the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, which we pray, of course, in the creed. But the word Son of God in the Old Testament was used for someone who was holy and righteous in God's sight. We see this, for example, in the Psalms. It says, "You are gods," right? Of course, with a small G. But the idea that you could be holy and righteous before God made you a Son of God. But Son of Man was a term that was used for the future coming of the Messiah. So St. Paul says that Israel was looking and longing

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for that king who, through the obedience of faith. Remember, the obedience of faith is listening to God's voice and allowing that voice to transform and to change our lives. That following God in that kind of obedience would lead them to truth. Who is Jesus Christ, right? Our Lord and King. So there's no longer a need to look for and to rely on any rulers of this world, for it is Jesus alone endowed by the Holy Spirit with wisdom, and knowledge, and fortitude, and fear of the Lord, right? So fear of the Lord there is "Yare" in Hebrew. The word fear means honor, reverence, and respect. It's a filial kind of fear. It's like the fear that we experience as children in not wanting to disappoint our parents, right? It's that kind of a loving fear. You know, again, honor, reverence, and respect, right? The fourth commandment, honor your father and your mother, right?

So when we give God that type of honor and glory, it's the Righteous King who rules over us, right? So when we submit ourselves to His rule, then He will rule in a way that will lead us to everlasting life because that is the goal. Life with God forever in heaven.

### **Understanding the Side of Joseph**

Now, Jesus gives us, God the Father gives us a model through Jesus in the Holy Family, right? So Jesus could have come into the world anyway that God chose. Jesus could have just came out of nowhere, just like Melchizedek, right? In the Book of Genesis. Melchizedek just appears to Abraham, and he makes an offering of bread and wine and Abraham gives him a tenth of all of his treasure that he had captured in battle. You know, so Jesus and Mary were given to Christ as a gift, you know? Why? It was through the family. We see this in Genesis chapter three, where Satan the snake tries to destroy the family by lying to them about their relationship with God. That God restores relationship with him through a family, through the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and, of course, St. Joseph.

So Joseph and Mary is important to remember that they were betrothed, right? Which means that they had entered into a legal marriage, but had not yet lived together. Now, that can seem confusing when we hear the readings in this last week or so of Advent because we think betroth means what it means today, which means engaged, right? But betrothal was the first step of a two-step marriage process called erusin in Hebrew. The first step is called erusin. So once the couple has agreed to marry, the wedding was arranged at the earliest possible opportunity, and right away, you know, if that were possible. But they would not start living together right away.

So once the legal marriage happened, it was with the rabbi and two are called "Shoshben" or witnesses, right? Which is the best man and made of honor or sponsors as they're called in canon law, witnesses. They didn't live together right away after the ceremony. So the ceremony established a legal covenantal bond between the couple, which could only be broken by death or divorce. But they didn't live together right away.

The wife would go back to her home and remain with her parents while the husband sets about building or buying a home for them to share. And it would be furnished and decorated to get ready for their new life together. Of course, she would also help, you know, in saying, you know,

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where things should be in the house just like, you know, a lot of wonderful wives do now. You know, I let my wife for sure when it comes to like where things go and pictures go, I let her decide all that. You know, my job is to just pay for it, right?

So he would make ready the home so that after the second part of the ceremony called the "nissuin", they would live together under one roof. And the "nissuin" was a colorful festive procession. When the wife was escorted by her whole family and her friends to the new marital home. And there was joyous songs that were sung. And as she enters into the home to take possession as the queen of that new home.

### **The Model of Our Family Life Today**

So you see the wonderful parallels here between the Blessed Mother who is the queen of the church, the queen of heaven and earth. and so she was the queen in the house with Joseph, right? And so when the angel came to the Blessed Mother. So it's important to realize that the angel Gabriel came after the legal covenantal ceremony, but before they established a home and lived together, right? So Jesus was not conceived out of wedlock. He was conceived through a covenantal marriage.

So why is this important? Because the covenant relationship with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden through the family, God now brings new and everlasting love, the new and eternal covenant into the world through a family, right? So what was lost through a family who's now regained through the most Holy Family. And that is the model for our family life today.

Now, we know that not all families, you know, have a mom and a dad, right? I mean my own experience, you know, I come from a divorced family. You know, and I know how difficult that can be, again, especially during this time of year. But the exception is not the norm, right? So, and honestly that played a role in my decision to become married 'cause I was actually scared to get married 'cause I didn't want to end up like my parents, you know? And so it was fear that was driving my decision not to get married. But again, when I spent time in prayer, and it was clear that God was calling me to the married life. And now, looking back, it makes total sense now when I see all the things that have happened in my life why that decision was so important and essential for how God chose to use me.

The same thing is true for each and every one of us. We may come from situations, even now, you know, you may be divorced right now. You know, you may be separated right now, you may be going through some struggles right now, but know that God loves each and every one of us totally, wholly, and completely. That even though we may not be in an intact family, that our hearts are still intact, that our lives are still intact, that we don't have to have hatred and animosity toward the other person, you know, that we still have to witness to the power of God's love, you know? I think that's incredibly, incredibly important to realize during this time of year. That God's love overshadows everything else that may separate us from His love, including animosity, anxiety, and feelings of hatred that we may have in our hearts during this time of year.

That's the darkness that the light of Christ's love needs to penetrate in a very special way during this Advent season.

## **Understanding St. Joseph's Side**

You know, the fact that Joseph had resolved to send Mary away, you know, which is their term for divorce, right? Shows that he was a righteous man. He was not filled with vengeance in spite, but he was a man whose heart overflowed with the merciful love and compassion of God, right? Because in Deuteronomy 22:22 and in Leviticus 20:10, it says, the penalty for adult was being stoned to death. And so Joseph did not want that to happen to Blessed Mother, so he asked for her to be put away quietly, right? For divorce.

But that's when the angel comes in and says, "Trust me. Trust God. God knows what He's doing. And you are an important part of that plan, Joseph. You're not just there, you know, as window dressing. You know, you have an essential role to play as an earthly father, as an earthly witness to Jesus." You know, and I can imagine that many of the stories that Jesus told, the parables that where he shared were from examples from carpentry and from the agrarian culture that was all around him. You know, there's no doubt that Joseph had a profound influence in the life of our Lord. I think that showed through his ministry and his love toward, especially the broken, toward the sick. I think he even got his leadership skills from St. Joseph, you know? Well, in this Earth, of course, he's God, right? We know that.

But even God allowed Himself in humility to be raised by a human father and a loving mother, you know? And so even though that may not be our experience, we can still use the Holy Family as a powerful witness and example of how God's love works in the family. And they're all members of the family of God, right? Because we're adopted brothers and sisters of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection, and so we all belong to that family. So that's really important to remember that we are still members of God's family no matter what our earthly family situation may be like.

So the angel, when he comes to Joseph, calls him Son of David, right? Because David is the greatest king in history of Israel. Now David wasn't perfect because remember that whole Bathsheba thing, right? So he wasn't perfect, but actually apostles caused him a man after God's own heart. That even though he transgressed against the Lord, he committed adultery, and then he had Bathsheba's husband killed, you know, that he still called the greatest king in history of Israel because he never worshiped a false god. He never worshiped another god. He may have transgressed against God, which he repented from, right? And the prophet Nathan acknowledges that, but he still considered the greatest king.

And so Joseph has the honor of being called Son of David, which is also, of course, what Jesus called as well, that shows he fulfills that messianic line and that promise that God gave to David, especially in Psalm 110 that says that you are a priest forever. That the Messiah will be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. And Jesus, of course, Melchizedek in Hebrew means the king of righteousness. Of course, Jesus is the King of righteousness who offered bread and wine,

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which became His body, blood, soul, and divinity, most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist. So Joseph had an important role to play in God's plan of salvation. And so do all of us. We have a part to play in God's plan of salvation. Now, Jesus did all the work, but he allows us to participate in that work of salvation. Joseph participated in the work of salvation by being the foster father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So the angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to have faith. And the same thing is true of us that we should not be afraid but to have faith. Joseph trusts God to take care and takes Mary into his own home.

So like Joseph, we, too, must trust God completely without reservation and not holding back anything of ourselves from him, not holding back any of our love from him. That we can make room in our hearts to take Mary and Jesus into our lives as well, into our hearts and into our homes this Advent season.

### **Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed**

So Jesus tells us that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, that we can move mountains. I often think about that a lot. You know, where's my faith? You know, I remember with my dad, you know, I never thought that he would ever come to faith. Never even gave it a second thought, but my mom did. My mom had such a tremendous faith. She prayed a rosary for 20 years every day with the sole intention of reconciling with my dad before she died.

And God answered her prayer. Several months before she died, she did indeed, in person. My father came out to Oregon, my mom was living with me. He came out and they reconciled, and she died a few months later. 20 years of praying the rosary. What faith? That's the faith the size of a mustard seed. I don't have faith like that. I mean, I wrote my father off. You know, I even told my kids he was dead, you know?

I mean, so God is so incredibly grace. All you have to do is have just enough faith, and we can move mountains. And this final time of preparation for coming of Christ, let us ask for that gift of faith. The faith the sizes of mustard seed. I did have the honor and privilege of being with my dad at his bedside when he died and praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for him. And so faith played an important role in my life, and I always ask God for more faith. When I saw how the witness of faith was really transformative in my father's life and how I saw how my mother's prayer, definitely contributed that. Like he used St. Joseph as a vehicle to help bring salvation, God used my mom and her praying the rosary as a vehicle to bring my father to saving faith. You know, it's a beautiful thing to have that gift of faith, to have that level of trust. And we're all lacking or wanting, you know, in that kind of faith in our lives from time to time.

So let us pray to have faith the size of a mustard seed. Just a little faith. Let us be inspired by the faith of the Holy Family, by the faith of Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary who said, *"Let it be done unto me according to thy word."*

You know, she didn't have a full understanding and appreciation for everything that God was going to do in her life. She didn't have a full understanding, appreciation for the gift that she was

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fully bringing to the world. We see signs of it in the Magnificat, but we see it in its full understanding at the foot of the cross, at the foot of the cross where her soul was pierced so that the thoughts of many hearts may be laid there. The faith of Joseph who was entrusted to help raise God.

I mean, as a father, I think about the tremendous possibility I have raising my own kids, but to be trusted with God as a baby to protect and defend, which he did so faithfully and so lovingly. So my friends, my brother and sisters in Christ, let this Advent, let this time of waiting for the coming of Christ be a time of joy and hope, of friends and family, to be witnesses to them, of God's love and His truth.

Let's be filled with a faith that inspires a Holy Spirit to enliven the Father's love in our hearts so that we can truly be inspirations of God's love and God's life to our friends, to our families, to our world. May God bless you and please be assured of my prayers for each and every one of you and for your families during this time of Advent, and may you have a very, very blessed Christmas and a joyous New Year in the Lord. I am praying for you. May God bless you abundantly. Amen.