

Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 23, 2012 • St. Rose of Lima Church, Newtown, CT

Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P.

December 14th—a day that we will never forget for the rest of our lives—is the feast day of St. John of the Cross.

In one of his poems, which is really a prayer, St. John of the Cross says:

Where have You hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled...
After wounding me;
I went out calling You, and You were gone.

Shepherds...
If by chance you see
Him I love most,
Tell Him that I sicken, suffer, and die.

Why, since You wounded
This heart, don't You heal it?
And why, since You stole it from me,
Do You leave it so,
And fail to carry off what You have stolen?

Extinguish these miseries,
Since no one else can stamp them out;
And may my eyes behold You,
Because You are their light,
And I would open them to You alone.

I. God has not disappeared

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, expresses a sentiment reflected in this poem that I suspect haunts many hearts these days:

Remarkably enough, the claim that there can no longer be any God, the claim, that is, that God has completely disappeared, is the urgent conclusion drawn by *onlookers* at the terror, the people who view the horrors from the cushioned comfort of their own prosperity and attempt to pay their tribute to it and ward it off from themselves by saying, “If such things can happen, there is no God!” But among those who are themselves immersed in the fearful reality the effect is not infrequently just the opposite: It is precisely then that they discover God.

And haven't we! That's why you're here.

Without question God hears the prayer of St. John of the Cross...which is so very much our prayer.

And from the moment that the Son of God comes to dwell in the womb of the Blessed Mother, Jesus begins to make his way to us in Mary who wastes not a second to be in our presence.

II. Mary comes to us

The Gospel says that Mary “set out and traveled...in haste” to the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Mary comes close to us in our sorrow to bring us the very closeness of God.

Mary hastens to make this journey in order to generate in us the very *union of love* that she experiences with the Son in her womb.

Because God knows that what so many of us want at this moment is the chance once again to mother the beloved children whom we have lost. And that is why God does for us the very thing that we want to do for them. He sends us a Mother to love us.

The 14th century Dominican mystic Blessed Henry Suso writes:

You, my Mother, you are the only hope and solace of my life. When I completely despair of God and of myself, thinking of you, recalling you, my spirit comes alive again, as if out of the deepest darkness. You are my glorying, my well-being, my honor, and my life. Remember, loving Mother, that mothers are accustomed to cherish their ailing children with greater care, to sympathize more with them, and to give them a more constant attention.... My wounds are known to you, loving Mother. Please now do visit your sick, raise up the dead. Amen.

When the Blessed Virgin Mary came to America in the visitation of the miraculous apparitions of Guadalupe, Our Lady said to Saint Juan Diego:

Know for certain that I am the perfect and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God.... Here I will show and offer all my love, my compassion, my help, and protection. I am your merciful Mother, the Mother of all who love me, of those who cry to me, of those who have confidence in me. I will hear their weeping and their sorrows...their necessities and misfortunes.... Listen and let it penetrate your heart.... Do not fear any illness or vexation, anguish or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?

It is as if Our Lady was speaking these words directly to the people of St. Rose of Lima Parish.

III. Elizabeth cries out in welcome

When Mary comes, Elizabeth welcomes her. And that is what this mystery of the Visitation begs of us: simply to welcome Mary, to love Mary who rushes to bring us the Presence of Jesus Christ.

Up to this moment, Elizabeth's whole life has been one of utter, heart-wrenching barrenness. And now as she faces a new impossible fact—that she is about to give birth to a baby as an old woman—she probably is consumed with a whole new kind of dread and doubt.

Fr. Robert Barron, commenting on the horrific events of Newtown, said this:

To believe in Christ is to believe in a power of love that is more enduring than anything that is in the world... We are in touch with a God who is greater than and more powerful than anything that is in the world.

That is the belief with which Elizabeth “cries out in a loud voice” to Mary.

And we recently heard that same cry of faith from two of our parishioners, parents of one of the child victims. Lynn and Chris McDonnell recently gave a television interview about their slain, six-year old daughter Grace. Lynn McDonnell said to the world:

Grace did not have an ounce of hate in her. Hate is not how our family is. We won't go down that road. We have to live through Grace.

It was as if the patron saint of our parish, St. Rose of Lima, herself had taken hold of Lynn's heart and prophetically given her such miraculous words of mercy. For through St. Rose of Lima, our Lord Jesus Christ said this:

Let all people know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Let them know that the gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase. Let people take care not to stray and be deceived. This is the only true stairway to paradise. We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions.... If only mortals would learn how great it is to possess divine grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious. How many riches it hides within itself, how many joys and delights! Without doubt...all people throughout the world would seek trouble, infirmities and torments, instead of good fortune, in order to attain the unfathomable treasure of grace.

Hail Mary...full of grace...blessed are you among woman! Tell Him whom we love most...that we sicken, suffer, and die. But we do not despair! Because you come to visit us...and we leap with joy in our darkness to receive the Communion of love who is the Fruit of your womb....