

The title of my homily is, "The Lord be with you," We say some form of this phrase at the beginning, middle, and end of every mass. I just said it again before I read the gospel. Today's 4th Sunday of Advent readings focus on this very phrase. In the Old Testament we see God the Father using this phrase with King David, and in the New Testament we see it being used with Mary, the mother of a new king. As we prepare for the coming of Christ (very soon) at Christmas, let's see what we can learn from these readings to help us open our hearts and let the Lord Jesus be with us as we begin the Christmas Season and the new year.

We started with a reading from 2nd Samuel. David was anointed King of Israel at a young age, and after serving for nearly two decades as king, he's expanded his kingdom through spectacular military victories. In this reading he expresses his desire to build a house for God, a temple for the Lord. Nathan, the prophet, affirms the idea and says, "Go, do whatever you have in mind," and adds the key phrase, "for THE LORD IS WITH YOU."

But that evening something unusual happens, the prophet receives a message from God that corrects his response to David. God puts things in perspective saying, "Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should YOU build ME a house to dwell in?' It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be a commander of my people Israel.'" God goes on to reiterate the theme of today's readings, "I have been with you wherever you went." God implies that He already has a house in David's heart, and that a physical building is not needed to house God. In life, we strive to be like David, to know God, and to hear the Lord's voice at the end of our lives saying, "I have been with you wherever you went."

Advent is about taking time to recognize God's role in our lives, and more so, to recognize our role in God's work, in His will, in the building up of His Kingdom. It's a time to consider what battles He's asking us to fight as he asked David to build up the Kingdom of Israel.

In the same reading where David suggests building a house for God, God promises to build a house for David. In this case the house is a dynasty, named after David and his reign. This is no ordinary promise, this is the Davidic Covenant, a promise that lasts until the end of time. God's promise is fulfilled with a nativity scene in the town of Bethlehem.

This takes us to Luke's gospel where the Angel Gabriel addresses Mary with the words of our theme today, "Hail, full of grace! THE LORD IS WITH YOU." Having the Lord with her both spiritually and physically in the person of Jesus, Mary plays a critical role in the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. Let's look closer at how God's promise from the first reading is fulfilled with Mary's help in this gospel.

In the first reading God tells David, "I will raise up your heir after you." In the gospel, Mary, an heir of David's, is told God will give Jesus THE THRONE OF DAVID his father.

The first reading says, "God will be a father to the new king" and the gospel says, "[Jesus] will be called Son of the Most High."

The first reading says, “Your kingdom shall endure forever,” and in the gospel we hear, “And of his kingdom there will be no end.”

God promised David, the Lord would come to be with all of us in flesh and blood, and the fulfillment of this promise is the reason we celebrate Christmas.

As for David, THIS was his greatest achievement. Peter Kreeft in his commentary on this reading says, “David having a great, great, granddaughter give birth to the Son of God was an infinitely greater privilege than being Israel’s greatest king.”

Now a story. My daughter’s boyfriend was born in Sweden and has recently received his US Green Card. During a family dinner this summer, we went around the table and discussed recent events in our lives and he shared the process of becoming a permanent resident. He prepared a four-inch binder full of forms, essays, and letters of recommendation explaining what made him exceptional, and the reasons he should be allowed to reside in our country. He joked that after all this work he was certified “exceptional.”

Like David and Mary, we all have the Lord with us. We are God’s adopted sons and daughters through the gift of Christ who was sent by the Father to redeem us. This honor is infinitely greater than any honor we can receive through our earthly accomplishments, even if we are certified “exceptional.”

The reason we hear the “The Lord be with you” so often at mass, is because Jesus is present in so many forms in the Holy Liturgy. The Lord is with us in the scripture, the Word of God that guides us as it guided David and Mary.

The Lord is with us in the congregation, the people of God, also called, “The Body of Christ.”

The Lord is with us in our priests who preside over the mass. They consecrate the bread and wine “In persona Christi,” a Latin phrase meaning “in the person of Christ.”

And the Lord is with us in the Eucharist, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. We receive him with the words, “The Body of Christ,” and reply, “Amen,” which means, “We believe.” In all these ways, the Lord IS WITH US at mass and this is the reason the mass is so central to maintaining His presence in our lives and on our planet.

In these last few hours of advent, we pray, “The Lord be with us,” in a special way as He was with David and Mary, to guide us through a happy, safe, and holy Christmas and throughout the new year. May our hearts be a temple for Christ to dwell in and may we live lives that reflect the presence of the Lord within each of US.