

Fourth Advent

Intro. As you know, a few weeks ago the pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Mandarin, was selected as the Auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Orange, California. He described how he got the news. During a meeting with the parish youth minister about an up-coming retreat, he received an unknown call from Washington, D.C., which he let go to voice mail. When he checked it, he was stunned to find it was from the papal nuncio who probably was used to his calls being answered immediately. The message said the nuncio wanted to have a conversation with him, to please call him back. Fr. Thanh probably wondered, “What does this mean?” It had to be something big; *change-your-life big*. And it was.

I. Mary had pretty much the same initial response. “Greatly troubled” probably doesn’t adequately describe her thoughts. Angels don’t come to your house unless something *really big* is going to happen to you! Her message was more shocking than Fr. Thanh’s. After hearing the news, *he* asked the nuncio for a half an hour to pray about this news. The nuncio replied, “Okay, but you will say yes, right?” *Mary* asked a question trying to understand this news. The angel gave an explanation that really didn’t explain, but gave her a sign she could verify: Elizabeth was expecting a baby. Mary knew that Elizabeth had not been able to have children; so this was a miracle. She said yes to the angel and God. Luke tells us, “Mary set out in haste” to Elizabeth’s house where she was able to *see* Elizabeth’s beaming

smile and *touch* the child in her womb. In that moment Mary knew it was all true for her.

Concl. God has a message for each of *us*. Usually it is not as clear as Bishop Thanh's phone call from the nuncio or Mary's visit from the angel or the sign of Elizabeth's miracle son. We have to look closely to see a sign or the *glimmer* of a sign and then we often say, "Nah, that can't be right." When I was struggling to figure out what I was supposed to do with my life, I failed to understand that every day is a step on that journey. Working at Church's Fried Chicken and then near the docks of the Port of Jacksonville told me that probably wasn't my life's work. My return to school through the visit with a friend was just the next intersection eventually leading to what God had in mind all along. I thought it was ten years in the making, from high school to

college; rather, it was twenty-eight years and nine months in the making. And it's not done yet.

Without the clear signs given to Mary and Elizabeth, for us, seeing the signs and reading them correctly is difficult and confusing at times. Zechariah laughed when the angel told him how his life was about to change with the birth of John the Baptizer to him and Elizabeth in their old age. Mary asked a question about how her life and Joseph's was going to change. We can be "greatly troubled" by God's message to us. [M. McGlone, NCR, 12/14/17]. It is okay for us to ask God a few questions about how **our** lives are going to change according to his plan. And it is alright for us to sometimes laugh and think, "How can this be possible?" The answer is, for God **nothing** is impossible.