

*The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Homily ~ December 18, 2011*

*Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
The Catholic Community of
St. John the Evangelist &
Blessed Sacrament*

It's an understatement to say that we live in a day of great fear. Do a search on Goggle for the word "fear" and you will come up with "The Phobia List," pages of phobias from A to Z...everything from *alliumphobia*—the fear of garlic—to *zemminphobia*—the fear of the great mole rat. It even lists *ecclesiophobia*—the fear of church. And get this, *homilophobia*—the fear of **homilies!**

We all have our own phobia list:

- Fear of daily bad news about the state of the economy.
- Fear of losing our personal security.
- Fear of bird flu or bad weather.
- Fear about getting a bad report from the lab on some recent blood work.
- Fear that a relationship will suddenly go south and disappear.

In addition, add to that panic-driven newscasters who can't even give the weather report without fear-filled baited breath.

Into this maze of fear we hear the word of the angel to Mary, "*Do not be afraid.*" The same word came to Joseph in a dream, "*Don't be afraid.*" The same word to Zechariah and Elizabeth, "***Fear not!***" The same word will ultimately come to shepherds in a field keeping watch over their flocks by night. "*Don't be afraid for I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.*" The same greeting, the same command repeated over and over again: "***Fear not!***" And the logical, sensible, 1st century response or 21st century response is, "You've got to be kidding!"

Mary had every reason to be afraid. Just imagine...an angel stands before her with word of an unexpected, unplanned pregnancy. Put yourself in the place of an unwed teenager who hears, "You're going to have a baby." Can you feel the emotions, the shock, the fear? Of course, if Mary is listening, it's even more

troubling than that. This is to be no ordinary pregnancy or ordinary baby. The baby is to be the Son of God! How would you like to take on that parenting responsibility?

Mary had every right to be afraid. And, of course, so are we.

In *The Wall Street Journal*, journalist Jane Spencer says, “In contemporary America, the safest society in recorded history, many people feel as though they have never been more at risk.”

And yet...and yet...the message of the angel still comes. *“Mary, don’t be afraid because the Lord is with you.”*

It’s so simple, yet so profound. *“The Lord is with you.”* The antidote for fear begins with faith in the God of the ages and the conviction that God is actively involved in the lives of his people. A God who is present. A God who is with us.

There is a story about an old African-American farmer. He had lived his life in the poverty of hardscrabble farming, the injustice of the Jim Crow era and the daily struggle for food and dignity. However, every Sunday he dressed up in the old suit he owned and carried his worn-out Bible to church with him.

One day a newly minted, seminary-trained theologian came to visit that little country church. Seeing the old farmer’s well-used Bible he asked, “What’s your favorite verse in the Bible?”

The old man said, “Ah, that’s easy, ‘It came to pass...’”

“But that isn’t a complete verse,” the well-educated seminary student said. “There must be more to it than that.”

The old man smiled and said, “You see, every time trouble would come into my life I would read, ‘And it came to pass...’ Every time sorrow came into my life I could say, ‘And it came to pass...’ See, sonny, I always knew trouble didn’t come to stay, it came to pass.”

A proper response to fear begins by recognizing it in all its reality, to look it square in the face, to know it for what it is, but also to know in the end fear does not have the last word, it only came to pass.

Most importantly, Mary, don’t be afraid because God keeps his promises.

Here is the hope for tomorrow, the word that helps us to see beyond the present into God’s good future.

Remember the story about the buy who hated his wife’s cat? He just hated that cat with a vengeance; but his wife loved the cat. One day the cat disappeared. His wife was grief-stricken so the man put an ad in the newspaper that offered \$500 for information on the missing cat. His friend saw the ad and said to him, “Wow! \$500 for word on that cat that you hated. That’s pretty risky, isn’t it?” With a sly, knowing twinkle in his eye, the man responded, “It’s not so risky when you know what you know.”

We know the end of the story. Life is not so scary when you know what you know. We know that God keeps his promises and sends a Savior. We know Jesus comes and his name is Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” Better yet, we know God promises that one day the lion will lie down with the lamb and a little child shall lead them. We know that one day they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against a nation. We know that one day God’s Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Life is not so scary when you know what you know, when you know the end of the story.

In this day, a day of great fear, hear the word of the angel. Don’t be afraid, not because there is nothing to fear, but because God is present. The Lord is with you. Don’t be afraid for the Savior will come. God keeps his promises and in the end, the fearsome things we fear do not have the last word.



~140th Jubilee ~

