

SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY, 18TH DEC. 2021
on Hebrews 10, 5 – 10 and Luke 1, 39 – 45.
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The fourth Sunday of Advent, my dear friends, makes you feel right next door to Christmas. Our city, our streets, our houses are already in glorious Christmas attire. We do not seem to be able to wait for the actual day of Jesus' birth. Probably quite a few people have forgotten what Christmas is really all about. In pagan times they celebrated the return of the light. Midwinter was the longest night which seemed to have no end. But light would not be overcome, and people showed their love and longing for the victorious light by their joy and celebrations.

For Christians the light became the obvious symbol of Christ, and the victory over darkness was the obvious symbol of Christ's resurrection and victory over death and sin. That victory started when God became man, and one of us in Jesus of Nazareth. Midwinter therefore became the anniversary of his birth. Christmas Eve is the actual moment and the fourth Sunday of Advent is the climax of our longing for His coming, the climax of the preparations for our Welcome of Christ.

When Saint Ignatius composed his Spiritual Exercises he wrote a special meditation on the Incarnation, the mystery of God becoming man. He invites us to envisage the Holy Trinity looking down on the earth and on the people in their ordinary lives. He invites us to try and look through God's eyes and see what they would see. See our world as it is, with all its violence and poverty. They would see people in distress and hopelessness. They see all the hatred and sins, the selfishness and indifference. Seeing all that they decide that the second person of the Trinity will come down and live with us as one of us, to save us all and show the way towards eternal life.

The unknown author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us of a vision like the one Ignatius offered us. He tells us of God being fed up with all the sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin-offerings that were offered by people according to the law. God is fed up with them, because they make no sense, unless they are signs of love and reverence, of repentance and good intentions.. So then, when the time had come and Christ came into the world He said: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God."

I come to do your will, O God! Not my will, not the will of the high and mighty of this world. Not what everybody does, but what You hoped for, my God: That people might live and give thanks and praise to your boundless generosity and love. Jesus did what He said. All his doings were according to God's will. He restored eyesight to the blind and made the lame walk. He freed those who were captives of evil spirits, the alcohol and drugs of those days, and to the poor He proclaimed good news. He went so far as to give his life to save us all.

I come to do Your Will! The gospel of this fourth Sunday of Advent brings to the foreground Mary, that young girl from Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph. The angel Gabriel had come to visit her and threw upside down everything she might have envisaged for her future. Very seldom has anyone been so directly confronted with the will of God as she was. To become the mother of the Messiah will not have come up in her wildest dreams. And yet, that was

what was asked of her. We know her answer: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Here we find the reaction God must have hoped for: "Here I am, I come to do your will!" Thanks to Mary's readiness to offer herself and her entire life, God came into our world. And every time someone is prepared to offer him- or herself to do what God, what love, what life asks, God comes into our world.

We see it happening in our own surroundings. I have witnessed forms of generosity that seem supernatural. A man suffers a spinal-cord-lesion from a cycling accident. His wife never hesitates to give up her life and all her plans and expectations and becomes his fulltime carer for almost twenty years now. Here I am, to come and do your will!

A young couple, happily married and expecting their first baby. Soon after the joy of its birth it turns out to be severely handicapped. It upsets their entire lives, and the care asked of them will not be a nine-to-five-job. But they said 'Yes' to this unexpected demand made on them. Here I am, we come to do your Will.

It is never easy. It asks your entire person. But that is the way God comes into our world.

And nearly every time you witness such demand and such generosity you will also hear that, in saying 'Yes', here I am, they find real self fulfillment and deep joy.

Preparing for Christmas has many layers. From utterly superficial offering of good wishes and expecting the happiness of the season, right down to accepting the challenges that love asks of us. Everyone of us has his or her own life. Everyone of us runs into demands made on us, that we had not catered for. Everyone of us has to come up with his or her answer. Everyone of us is asked to help God come into our world this Christmas. Everyone of us can do just that by deciding to be there, to do God's Will as it presents itself to me, to you, to each of us.

Amen.