Homily for 4th Advent 2014
December 21, 2014
Readings: 2 Sam. 7.5-16, Ps. 89, Rom. 16.25-27, Lk. 1.26-38
Place: Stella Niagara
Theme: Believe and obey. Let God work through you.

A rhetorical question: “what significant or even grandiose things do you wish you could do for God”? ... Possibly, an end to wars and the concomitant establishment of genuine peace? ... An end to poverty so that there would be a fairer distribution and enjoyment of the basic necessities of life including education and health care? ... That the Catholic Church’s efforts and programs for a “New Evangelization” would lead to a deepening of faith, hope and charity; and a subsequent growth in Catholic spirituality and membership? ...

What might be God’s response to our list of actions we would like to do for him? ... After hearing today’s readings, I think God might say to us, “Thank you for the wonderful things you want to achieve for me. But, what I want is that you would allow me to achieve my good things through you.” Let’s review today’s readings.

In today’s first reading, King David laments to the prophet Nathan, “Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent.” David was feeling magnanimous, which etymologically means “of great heart.” He wanted to do something good for God, namely, build an appropriate house for the ark of the Covenant. But God speaks through the prophet Nathan, “You will build me a house to dwell in? ... I called you. I chose you. I changed your vocation from shepherding sheep to shepherding my people Israel. I gave you military victories over your enemies. I brought justice and peace to your homeland. I defeated the wickedness practiced by your people. I gave you everything that you have, and now, you want to build a house for me? Feel the irony. ... God continues speaking through the prophet, “The Lord will establish a house for you. I will raise up an heir after you, ... and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever.” Through the prophet Nathan, God admonished and instructed David to keep a proper perspective. Who is in charge? God is in charge.

St. Paul’s pericope intrigues me. I am a lifelong student, an old teacher, and I like to write from time to time. This morning’s pericope from Paul is one sentence long. It has 73 words! We grammarians in the chapel this morning would declare, “this is not a run-on sentence; this is a run-on paragraph!” This one sentence has six verbs, expressed in three subordinate compound clauses each of which contains numerous lengthy prepositional phrases. As a teacher, I would have written in red ink at the bottom of this composition, “this paragraph lacks clarity; it is too long and too complex.” In the process, however, I would have missed the profound message of this inspired word of God! My starting point, my initial reaction, my first impulse is to place more importance on the construction than the content. I approached this reading from my perspective rather than from God’s perspective. Humbly, I admit that I missed God’s point which is “that all nations would obey and have faith.” Instead I focused on my point of criticizing the style of St. Paul.
In the gospel, who of us cannot identify with Mary? The gospel reports that she was “greatly troubled.” The angel’s first words are, “Do not be afraid.” Mary questions, “how can this be since I have had no relations with a man?” The angel explains to her what will transpire. The angel’s explanation, however, raises more questions, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God.” Imagine Mary listening, pondering, and yielding. She does not understand it all, and she could never have imagined these things, but she yields to what God has planned for her. She replies, “I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word.”

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the readings suggest that what God wants us to do is to let him do something through us. David and Mary did wonderful things. Their greatest accomplishment was to let God work through them. Sisters and lay friends, undoubtedly individually and collectively, however, we have done and continue to do great things for God, but our greatest accomplishments will be to let him work through us. During these next four days, try to make quiet time, preferably in chapel, in order to let God work through you. At the beginning of this homily, I invited each person to identify a few things we would like to do for God. Do you remember some of those things? ... We will come closest to achieving those things by letting the graced power of God work through us. Like David and Mary, when we cooperate with God’s word and act according to his ways, God achieves great things through us, more than we ever could have imagined. Today’s theme is, “Believe and obey. Let God work through you.”