



Blessed are You, Who are Not Too Small (Advent Week 4)

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This reflection was first posted by Audrey, fcJ on her blog, surprising-grace.blogspot.com.

“You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” (Micah 5: 2) Thus begins the first reading of this Sunday.

This is one of many surprising statements in the scriptures, in which those who are “small” and overlooked are actually the ones blessed and chosen by God. The Gospel reading also takes up this thread as it follows the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, two poor women from a backwater place, to whom God has inexplicably come. “And how does this happen to me...?” asks Elizabeth, not quite daring to believe (Luke 1: 43a).

In fact, Jesus himself will go on to spell out this principle authoritatively in one of his best-known sermons: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6: 20)

Most of us would have come across that verse many times. Often, though, for those of us who are not materially poor, there is a temptation to “whitewash” the statement; to avoid its discomfiting sting; to talk instead of being “poor in spirit”.

But what would it mean to take Christ’s message as he meant it? For a long time the Church has taught a “preferential love for the poor” that demands not just charity, but justice. This message has been reiterated time and again in papal encyclicals. For example, as Pope John Paul II says in *Centesimus Annus*:

“... to care for the poor and the excluded does not only call for acts of “charity”, but also by making social and economic opportunities be accessible to them. To counter social exclusion is to make society’s playing field level for all. “It is not merely a matter of ‘giving from one’s surplus’, but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development.” (58)

This is a radical call. It calls us to no less than complete transformation of our social structures that oppress and exclude the poor – those very social structures that some of us have benefited from at the expense of others. This means to first become aware of our own complicity in the suffering of others, and then to take action for real change.

No wonder we would prefer to just stick with our comfortable devotions, our “me and God” spirituality!

And perhaps we also wonder what we individually could possibly do against the seemingly impregnable forces that maintain the status quo in our world. To us, then, our readings this Sunday offer hope. *The hope that, like God did for Mary and Elizabeth – poor women from whom no one could expect anything great – God has also planted the seed of a dream in each of us that will come to birth, grow, and flourish in ways that no one could possibly expect. We are asked only to have faith in this dream of God for us, and to say “yes” to it, as Mary did.*

As Elizabeth would say, “Blessed are you who believe that the dream of God for you will be fulfilled!”

You can [download the reflections](#) or take a look at the [Scripture readings](#) for the Fourth Sunday of Advent.



“ La Sociedad no es obra mía; es obra de Dios y Dios sabrá cómo sostenerla, si es su voluntad. ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

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