

Homily 24th December Advent IV

You know, St Bernard in the 12th century was a great preacher and preached regularly of great devotion to Mary the mother of God. In fact, it was him who said, "Love gave her a thousand titles."

And I'd like to read a little extract from the homily of St Bernard on this very gospel.

"You have heard that you shall conceive and bear a son. You have heard that you shall conceive not of man, but of the Holy Spirit. The angel is waiting for your answer. It is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for the word of pity, even we who are overwhelmed in wretchedness. And behold, to you the price of our salvation is offered. If you consent straightaway, shall we be freed? In the eternal word of God, were we all made and lo, we die; by one little word of yours in answer shall we all be made alive. Adam asks this of you, O loving Virgin."

"Poor Adam, exiled as he is from paradise with all his poor, wretched children. Abraham begs this of you, and David. This all the holy fathers implore, even your fathers who themselves are dwelling in the valley of the shadow of death. This the whole world is waiting for, kneeling at your feet. And rightly so, for on your lips is hanging the consolation of the wretched, the redemption of the captive, the speedy deliverance of all who otherwise are lost. In a word, the salvation of all Adam's children, of all your race. Answer, O Virgin, answer the angel speedily. Rather through the angel answer your Lord. Speak the word and receive the word, offer what is yours and conceive what is of God. Give what is temporal and embrace what is eternal. Why delay? Why tremble?"

"Believe, speak, receive. Let your humility put on boldness and your modesty be clothed with trust. Open, O blessed Virgin, your heart to faith. Open your lips to speak, open your bosom to your maker. Behold the desired of all the nations is outside, knocking at your door. O, if by your delay you should pass by and again in sorrow you should have to begin to seek for him whom your soul loves. Arise then, run and open. Arise by faith, run by the devotion of your heart, open by your word." And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'"