

Homily December 24, 2017 Advent 4

Since 1864 US coins have been stamped with the phrase "In God we trust." I am not sure exactly what that means in the context of our secular civic culture; I find enough challenge in the concept in the context of our Catholic religious faith. Perhaps my challenge comes from knowing that we are supposed to use our wits. We are supposed to plan and calculate and make our best efforts. I think we are even supposed to "worry" a bit if it keeps us on task. Nevertheless, we are called to have trust in God.

Trust is aligned with the theological virtues of Hope and Faith. Hope is the virtue by which we live in expectation of divine blessing and heaven while also holding the fear of offending God's love and enduring punishment. We trust that our efforts to live lives as faithful Christians will result in eternal life. Faith is the virtue that allows us to believe in God and to have a relationship with Him in the first place. It includes accepting the truth of what God has revealed, because as God He is reliable. We trust that in prayer we truly speak to God and He speaks to us. We trust that whenever we act in accordance with what God has revealed we will be doing what is right and for our good and the good of others. And the actions we do because we trust in God are related to virtue of charity. Our trusting actions place a claim on God's love, they express our love for Him, and so often they do include expressions of love for others.

Trust is also associated with risk. Trust is needed because of the lack of certainty about the things we believe in or the things we hope for. In every trusting choice there is a risk. Will my choices that often call for sacrifice, really bring happiness? Will my choices that set aside some pleasure or acquisition of things and even embrace pain really serve the greater good, both here and hereafter?

Today's Gospel presents a beautiful story of trust, the trust of Mary in God. It is the trust of Mary in the message of the angel. It is the trust of Mary that, as difficult as it seemed she really was being touched by God in a most profound way in order to have a unique and powerful role in the establishment of His kingdom on earth. We should not be too simplistic in reading the account of the annunciation as digested by the Gospel writers and read from our 21<sup>st</sup> century faith. It is not as if Mary moved on from the experience with the path before her precisely outlined. She would have to trust God, over and over again. We see the uncertainty of the experience, from her

perspective in her reactions. She was "greatly troubled" by the angel's greeting. She questioned how she could be the Mother of the Redeemer, since she was not married. And yet, in trust she did say yes. She would have to be trusting in the difficult journey to Bethlehem for the census. The prophetic words she heard when she took the infant to the temple, words about the sorrow she would experience called for trust as she pondered them. In trust she still had to flee with Joseph to protect the infant from Herod, there was no presumption He would otherwise be spared. Her need to trust was evidenced in the sorrow and anxiety she experienced when Jesus was lost in the temple. It was trust, not presumption in Mary's heart when she asked Jesus to perform the miracle at Cana and then advised the waiters to "do what He tells you." It was in trust and not certainty that she stood beneath the cross and visited the empty tomb. And it was in trust that she gathered in prayer with the apostles for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The annunciation provides a beautiful example of what it means to trust in God. It is trust that involves cooperation with God; it involves planning, discerning, choosing and even some worrying. It is trust that relies on an ongoing intimacy with God. The annunciation perhaps more importantly reminds us of the trust that God places in us as well. God entrusted His Incarnate son to Mary as His Spirit conceived the life in her womb. He entrusted God Incarnate to her nurturance and care alongside St. Joseph. God repeats that trust in every conception wherein He cooperatively endows the tiniest of embryonic lives with an immortal soul, the indelible stamp of humanity, His image. Each conception of each human person becomes an act of trust that those who share responsibility for that life will do everything possible to see that life mature and image God in everything he or she will do.

God trusts that we, each of us who began as that tiny image of God, will trust in Him. It is partnership of trust that should mark everyday of our lives. We choose to say yes to God in many ways, each day. And, we believe, each act of trust in God brings a return entrustment of some new grace, a greater sharing of His divinity, that He wants us to continue to use fruitfully. And so often we take the risk in that yes to God, the risk of the loss of pleasure, of things, and even of friends, because we trust that yes to God is always, in the long run, a yes to true and enduring happiness for ourselves and others. And

sometimes that run can be very long, and the roadway of trust is not as easily mapped as we would like.