

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Nearer Than We Realize

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Galatians 4:4-5

*We have to dare to say, "I trust you; I entrust myself, with all my being, body, mind and soul to you. I don't want to keep any secrets from you. You can see everything I do and hear everything I say. I don't want to be a stranger any longer. I want you to become my most intimate friend." (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 58)*

When we say that God draws near to us, we mean that God draws *very near*. "God sent his Son, born of a woman." Born of a woman—from a human womb, laid into human arms, crying with human lungs and tears. It just doesn't get any closer than inside a womb. It doesn't get any closer than in a mother's arms. God has drawn near!

And why has God drawn near? So that we might be God's children. So that we, too, may be as close to God as a baby is to its mother—enshrined in her womb, wrapped in her arms, crying to her with real, hot, human tears. This closeness is offered to us—will we accept it? Will we entrust ourselves, body and soul, to this God who has drawn near?

Lord Jesus, in you God has drawn near to me and to our world. I entrust myself to you completely. Change my heart with your nearness. Amen.

MONDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Simply Ourselves

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Luke 1:46-49

*Praying demands poverty, that is, the readiness to live a life in which you have nothing to lose so you can always begin afresh. Whenever you willingly choose this poverty you make yourself vulnerable, but you also become free to see the world and to let the world show itself in its true form. ... You can proclaim loudly what you know through your intimate contact with God, who is the source of all life. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 123)*

Lowliness, poverty, vulnerability—are these strengths or weaknesses? Our world certainly doesn't encourage us to be "lowly" in any way! But God does. These things—and all kinds of humility and smallness—are spiritual goods *when we choose them*. Poverty should never be inflicted on anyone; when it is, it is a great evil. No one should ever be humiliated—forced into vulnerability or a sense of lowliness. And yet, when we have the freedom to choose these things—an intentional simplicity of life, a humility that allows us to see our true selves, a vulnerability that opens us to others—when we choose them, they can bring us such peace! We can stop grasping for more. We can stop trying to be something we are not. We can stop trying to keep up with someone else. Instead, we are simply ourselves—our beautiful, lowly selves—before our holy and loving God.

Lord, help me to embrace simplicity, humility and a quiet life so I may be filled with your love and goodness. Amen.