

Fourth Sunday of Advent December 18, 2011 B

DAVID, PAUL AND MARY

I assume you have heard of the famous singing trio—Peter, Paul and Mary. Today’s scriptures feature another prominent trio—David, Paul and Mary—on whom Fr. Steiner has written the following reflection:

David, Paul, Mary. Each name elicits awe and respect. Comparing ourselves to them can make us feel humble, but we should not feel the lesser with comparison. Instead, comparing ourselves to them should create within us a sense of relief about who we are. David, Paul and Mary stand as convincing examples that we, too, can be participants in God’s plan for the world.

Unfortunately, we make their accomplishments seem so unbelievably fantastic that we convince ourselves that we cannot repeat their successes. We must make ourselves remember, however, that it is not what they did but instead what God did through them that makes us remember them.

The special mark of these people is that despite becoming king, apostle and Mother of God, they are not much different from us. Each of them simply rose to the occasion to do God’s will when given the opportunity. We can do the same. Unfortunately, we are so often focused on what was accomplished through them by the end of their lives that we forget their beginnings, which reminds us of how much we hold in common.

David came from a family of shepherds, the family of Jesse. He was the youngest among many brothers—so young that when the prophet Samuel appeared, seeking God’s chosen from among Jesse’s sons, David was too young to be invited to the meeting. He was left tending the sheep and had to be sent for as an afterthought.

Paul was student of the Law from a well-to-do family, but who learned to be a tentmaker in order to support himself while studying. Like many college students of our day, the more learning opened his mind, the more he was filled with a zeal for getting into the world.

When we meet **Mary** in Luke’s Gospel, she is only a young girl from a poor family, perhaps around 14 years old, the age of an eighth grader or high school freshman. Her very ordinary life had progressed normally. At the usual time, she was betrothed to a man chosen by her family.

These were individuals, two barely out of childhood

and one still in studies, whose beginnings are echoed in our own. From their families, families like our own, they had inherited faith. Each in turn had learned to use his or her faith, and it was because of this faith that they were able to participate with God when the opportunity was presented.

The Second Book of Samuel tells us of David in mid-life. David’s faith helped him realize that he had been blessed in many ways. He knew his ascent to the throne was miraculous. After all, had not Saul, the prior king, sought to have him killed?

David, knowing that thanks to God were in order, saw that his palace was better than the tent in which the Ark was housed. David saw in this injustice his opportunity to offer thanks. He acted on what he saw. God took David’s desire to correct the injustice and, instead of accepting a temple, made of David’s house a nation out of which came our Savior.

Paul had converted hundreds and was regarded as a hero, but he thwarted the efforts of people to praise him and instead gave every credit for who he was and what he had accomplished to God. Paul knew it was not what he had done that was amazing but instead what God had done.

In many ways, **Mary** was no different from any girl her age. But, like David, she managed to see God’s hand in all that happened to her. Initially afraid of what was presented to her and doubting her own worthiness, she still seized an opportunity to participate with God. God repaid her humble acceptance of this event by making her the first among women.

These individuals saw opportunities to serve God, and they took them. But the accomplishments that followed are what God did.

Too often we feel that success is beyond our grasp. But **David, Paul and Mary** should offer us a sense of relief. All we have to do is try. Our hope for success never rests on what we can do. Rather, our hope rests on what God will do through us. **David, Paul and Mary** never dreamed of what would happen in their lives or what they would accomplish. They certainly never worried about what they could and could not do. They just trusted and just acted. They gave God his chance, his opportunity to work miracles.

Why is it that these three young people could so easily say, “Yes, Lord,” and we adults can’t even work up the

nerve to pass out bulletins at Mass. How is it that we can see the miracles God has worked through the simplest of people and continue to say, “Oh, I couldn’t possibly do that”?

We must not let their example escape us. Through their willingness to try and serve God, Jesus Christ entered the world. In turn, we are offered the opportunity to help the Lord build his kingdom, work that will continue until he returns in glory.

Advent reminds us of what can be accomplished if we prepare the way of the Lord. We must find our opportunities, seize them and not be surprised by the miracles that follow. (End of Article)

As I try to more and more look at life through the lens of **stewardship**, I see David, Paul and Mary as wonderful examples and models of what it means to be a good steward. All three of them could have led their lives as they wanted or lived as God wanted them. They placed their lives in his hands and let him do mighty things through them.

Shirley, Richard and Joanie—examples of Christian stewardship

In a piece in *Church* magazine, Fr. Eugene Lauer writes the following:

At a recent conference on parish life, I met some remarkable stewards of the Lord.

Shirley, an older woman has spent all her adult life working for non-profit organizations and church-based ministries at minimal salaries: soup kitchens, parish social service groups, immigration movements. She has a master’s degree, is very articulate, and could easily have had a very prosperous career in business or the academic world, but she chose a life of service.

Richard is a former bank executive who worked in Manhattan for many years. Then, in his prime, he chose to be ordained a deacon and serves a parish and a Catholic high school in a variety of ministries. He speaks with a smile about his days in high finance but insists that he wouldn’t trade what he is doing now for any other work.

I met a young woman named Joanie who has all those gifts that society judges would lead only to a top-of-the-line career wherever she might choose to go. She is very talented, with a master’s degree and is considering a doctorate, has a sparkling personality, and is very attractive. She affirms that she will spend her life in some form of social justice work—and says so with a deeply considered conviction.

What motivates them all? How did they come to such decisions? One of the speakers at the Institute, Scripture scholar Dianne Bergant, C.S.A., was explaining a biblical

concept that may be what they all hold in common at some deep level within. The Jewish-Christian Scriptures maintain, she said, that we have received our gifts and talents from the Divine, not as our absolute personal possessions, but “in trust.” We have been entrusted with certain skills to nurture and cultivate God’s world, and to assist our brothers and sisters in reaching their full human dignity as they, too, respect and care for this beautiful thing called creation.

*It is true that many people work hard on developing their talents, spend long hours refining and enhancing their gifts. For this they deserve real credit. But the question remains, do they do so primarily for their own benefit as though these **gifts are theirs by right?***

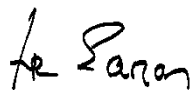
Perhaps this biblical notion needs to be highlighted in our Western industrialized societies that have such an attachment to individualism and personal rights, an attachment that often leads to the rape of the planet and lack of concern for our sisters and brothers at the bottom of society.

It is clear to me now that I meet many people at all of our conferences who hold in common the conviction that they have their gifts/talents “in trust” from the Divine. And, I pray that the readers of this column feel the same.

Reflection questions

- ◇ **To what extent am I aware of how much God wants to use my life to touch the lives of others?**
- ◇ **To what extent do I tend to look at my life through the lens of stewardship?**

Have a blessed week,



Reflection questions

- ◇ **Spiritually, how has this Advent season been for you?**
- ◇ **How can you be a spiritual conduit for the Good News this Christmas season?**