

4th Sunday of Advent – Cycle B (December 18, 2011)

When we think of Christmas, most of us imagine wrapped gifts under the tree, delivered by Santa, of course. "What's underneath the wrapping," we ask? Each gift is a mystery; waiting to be unveiled. Last year, we emptied the chapel in Avila Place to make way for a new meeting space. As the wall behind the altar was dismantled, we discovered the complete tabernacle that was hidden behind the wall, except for the door ; all that was visible to the congregation was the door to the tabernacle. We removed the tabernacle and had it fully refinished and restored: it is magnificent and beautiful.

The tabernacle is our "holy of holies" the place where the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is kept. In the first reading, David is concerned that he is living in a beautiful palace, whereas the Arc of the Covenant resides in a simple tent. His solution: build a magnificent temple where the Arc could rest. But God had other plans. Yes, a temple would be built with a "holy of holies" for the Arc, but an even more awesome temple would be built, the foundation being David's ancestral line, and the brick and mortar would be people....humanity.

The Annunciation is when this new "temple" made of human beings is formally announced by Gabriel to Mary. Her "yes" thrusts humanity in a new direction: We would become builders of this temple with our own lives. As Mary became the new "arc," the human tabernacle, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit conceiving the Child who would be the foundation of this new Temple. We, too, are called to say "yes" to the Divine Plan. Each one of us is a living, breathing tabernacle in that we carry within us the Christ, and our souls are the dwelling place of his Divine Presence.

Like the presents under the tree, this Christ is hidden in our bodies and souls and we must open the door to the tabernacle of our hearts and let the Christ inside. Actually, He already is inside, He lives in our hearts but we fail to sense His Presence. This the irony of the spiritual life: we let inside our hearts the God who already is there.

Each one of us is a living and breathing gift from God to all of humanity. Sometimes, we ourselves, do the unwrapping or unveiling, allowing God to be made known; or another human being enters our lives and helps us to see the hidden treasure that is our life; maybe we are visited by an angel or a ghost of our past, present or future who helps us to see our hidden value and worth.

This beautiful tabernacle I found in the chapel is a symbol of each one of you: *You* are the greatest gift God has given to the human race; *you* are the tabernacle that carries within the hidden presence of God. Each time we experience the hidden presence of God within, we say "yes" to this God of life, giving birth to Christ in our own time and place. And in doing so, the Temple shines just a bit more.