

In our current day and age, we have lost the idea of sending written greetings. But our second reading today was St Paul's send off, how I might sign a letter, "Sincerely yours in Christ, Father Danny Grover, pastor of this, pastor of that," and that'd be my send off. For St Paul, everything that is in the second reading today to the Romans, is led toward the glory of God.

And everything that we have in all three of our readings today, from Samuel, from St Paul, and from our Gospel today, are all about how God speaks to us. The problem though, is I think we've lost something in translation. We are stuck with LOL, and YOLO, and SMH, which I just learned means shaking my head. (I'm a little old, what can I say?) We've learned these different things but we're stuck in this digital age where we have this instant gratification. Messages sent back and forth, and sometimes we lose the beauty of a written letter.

And then it makes more difficult for us to see okay, how is God trying to speak to me? When all I can understand are all these short quippy little quotes, or now these emojis that then explain *everything*. Its hard for us to take to heart what God's trying to say to us, let alone hear when He's trying to speak to us.

Imagine if an angel came to you today and said, "Hark! Heaven has come to earth! Congratulations!" If an angel came in today we wouldn't know how to respond. We wouldn't know, and we'd think, "Is this really and angel from God? Am I hallucinating? What's really going on right here?" We wouldn't really be able to hear the message that God's trying to proclaim to us because it's a foreign concept to us. I think most of us the easiest way the hear God today would be if He writes us an email or sends us a text. But I don't think God is as tech savvy as some of us are. He's beyond that, I think.

How does God speak to us? There was this tapestry on the wall in our house growing up, it said, “Sunrise is His message, sunset is His signature.” God speaks to us through the everyday events of our lives. And we have to be able to listen. We have to stop and take notice of those things around us. And during the Advent season, and the Christmas season it seems easier to do so. Because we’re around family and it’s a joyous occasion, for most families.

But do we take note of how God’s trying to speak to us. As I mentioned last week, are we really reflecting on Him, the Joy to the World? And the one phrase I may have talked about last week, the phrase in the song Joy to the World, “Let every heart prepare Him room.” Let **every** heart prepare Him room.

These songs we hear all the time – do we sit there and say “Oh I really like the tune of that?” Or do we listen to the words of the song? It’s amazing, when I go to sporting events, I’ll say, “Oh, I really like that tune,” then I’ll listen to the words, and I’ll say, “Oh I really don’t like that song though!” Do we pay attention to the words of the songs that we listen to? And I’d probably win a bet saying that most of us don’t actually listen to the words.

But when it comes to the hymns at church, the words most times are ancient the words from Scripture, especially the psalms that we sing every Sunday, that we get from the 150 Psalms of David. They’re here to teach us about relationship. Relationship with who? Well with each other, yes, but first and foremost our relationship with God.

And as we come here again on this fourth Sunday of Advent, and as we light the fourth candle, the candle meant for love and charity, we are called to remember the message that our lives proclaim. The message that we are created in the image and likeness of God. The image and likeness of love, and to integrate that love into our very

selves, and then to share that love with everyone we come into contact with.

Our message, and our lives when lived rightly always harkens back to our Creator. That's what these readings today are trying to get us back to. How can we live so as to give glory to God? How can we live so as to not be taken aback if an angel were to come in? And instead say, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word."

The strength of Mary! Many times, when we think of Mary we think of this very wise woman, who is older; 40's, 50's. Knows everything, is the most pious person in the world. But when we look at Mary in today's Gospel, she was a 13 or 14-year-old girl. There are young ladies in this church that are about that age. And if an angel came to you and said, "Hey, you're gonna be pregnant!" Most of your responses would be, "No I'm not, it ain't gonna happen! This isn't gonna happen!"

And when I preached about it at Bishop McGuinness, because this is the same Gospel as the Immaculate Conception, I said, "Ladies, look around. Freshmen, you're all around 13, 14 years old. Imagine an angel coming to you. I kind of got a "Not me" look. The strength and the courage that Mary would have had to show in the face of this message from God is something I don't think we really give credit to her for. We just kind of assume, well, yes of course she had to do it. But did she? Was she free to make her decision? She was as free as you and I are to make our decisions. She wasn't hampered by sin. She had never been touched by sin. She had seen sin around her, but she had never sinned.

And so that room within her life, within all our lives, where we're called to prepare a room for the Lord, was filled with His presence because she hadn't allowed sin to take that place. The reason I talk

about reconciliation so often, isn't just because I like to hear confessions (though I do). But it's because I recognize that sin gets in the way of our relationship with God. And if we truly want to be people of joy seeking the Joy of the world, as we prepare in this Advent season for Christmas, then we must prepare a room for Him in our hearts and kick out that sin that blinds us to the love of God in our lives.

That's what this whole season is about. To help us turn away from those things that have turned us away from the love of God so that we can truly incorporate the message that He gives to us every time we open the Scriptures. A little more deeply into who we are and how we live our lives. It's difficult, yes. But it's how He leads us. The message that God has given to us.

The message of love for each and every one of us. But its also the one thing that unites us. Its that message that God loves you, and there's nothing you can ever do that could ever make God love you less. Yes, you're a sinner, but so is everyone. And just because you're a sinner doesn't mean that God loves you less or that He doesn't love you! Stop defining yourself by your sin. Instead begin defining yourself by how God created you and who He created you to be!

When I heard that message for the first time that my sins don't define who I am it was like you could take away that weight that was on my shoulders that I had allowed to crush me down. All the bullying that I went through as a kid, all the depression that I had, it just all of a sudden lifted!

Because there was hope again. And hope is the joy that is present in the love of God. That 's the message that Jesus wants you to hear. And you know what? You guys are all screw ups but so am I! And as a movie that I saw this last week reminded me, we learn from our mistakes, and sometimes those are the best things that we can make so

as to learn from them. I just sometimes wish that I had followed my parents' advice and learned from my siblings' mistakes instead of making my own every time. But sometimes we get stubborn, sometimes we get pigheaded. We say, "No, it won't be that way with me, it was just that way with them. I won't fall into the same traps as them." And then we do.

That message that God's trying to give us, that message is that "You are my beloved child, and I love you." If for no one else, God would have created the earth for you. I don't know about you but that's a message that we don't hear enough we don't tell our families enough.

Do we tell our children we love them? Do we tell our parents we love them? Do we tell our siblings, "You drive me up the wall, but I love you anyway?" Do we proclaim that love daily as He does to us? When we wake up, as He give us this message with that sunrise, do we give thanks to God for the love that will be presented to us that day? And then do we share that love, that message till the sun goes down? And do we give thanks to God yet again for the success of our works?

My brothers and sisters, as we conclude our time of preparation the time is coming for us to accept the Lord into our lives. For us to allow His love to penetrate even more into us and to go out and share His love with all the people with whom we have contact.