

**Homily for December 23, 2001
4th Sunday of Advent Cycle A**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Isaiah 7:10-14
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-24**

God's will for the world's fulfillment is irresistible and unstoppable.

The world seemed to stand still way back there in September when fear and terror gripped us – it changed our world – it touches even Christmas. It has affected our dreams.

From the moment a couple learns that they will be parents, they begin to dream about and dream for their child. The first dreams are for a safe birth, a strong and complete body, good health and physical development. Then parents dream that their son or daughter will excel in sports, master the sciences, or distinguish themselves in the arts, music, or literature. Then they even dare to dream that their child may one day be elected President, quarterback the 49ers, sing at the Met, or conquer Wall Street.

Along the way, of course, the dreams change. Where they once dreamt about the Nobel Prize, mom and dad will now settle for passing algebra. The dream of the World Series ring is quickly forgotten when anguished parents wait and hope that their son will walk again or that their daughter will wake up after a horrible accident. The dream of a Bill Gates-like fortune all but disappears when mom and dad desperately pray for their child's safe return from a dangerous sojourn into the world of drugs, sex, and violence.

Joseph dreamt dreams for his family as well. This Sunday and next we will hear about two of his "dreams" as recounted in the gospel of Matthew. In today's chapter one, the angel assures Joseph that he should not fear about taking his beloved Mary as his wife despite her pregnancy, that his compassion and love for her will not be disappointed. Next week, the Sunday after Christmas, we will hear the angel tell Joseph to take his family to Egypt to escape King Herod's murderous search for the child.

The events of ordinary life from day to day and year to year, as well as the catastrophic events of last September, change and alter our more grandiose dreams for our children. But, as Joseph learns from his "dreams," the most important things we can dream for our children are that they know the love and safety of a family, the acceptance and forgiveness of understanding parents, and the knowledge and wisdom of the God of graciousness and peace – a God whose will for life in human history is irresistible and unstoppable. No matter what the human obstacles, the irrevocable will of God, revealed in Jesus – this will to love the world into redemption – proceeds undaunted and undiminished.

Look at how many hurdles are bounded over in our story thus far this holy season: Mary's fear, her

questions, her virginity, Elizabeth's old age, Joseph's shame, his painful decision to divorce Mary. And there are more to come. And the point of all this? The point is that nothing will slow the onrush of God's love for us, neither then, neither now, nor tomorrow.

We can all surrender into fear and terror and have qualms and reservations about our future, but God's ways are not our ways. What we think should stop hope and life in its tracks seems to accelerate God's movement toward us. It may be difficult to understand, hard to swallow, but it's both comforting and encouraging. This holy food and fellowship are pledge of that hope.

**God's will for the world's fulfillment
is irresistible and unstoppable.**