

## **Fourth Sunday of Advent C/2006**

There are moments in life where people have very interesting encounters, which are really determining and decisive for their lives. Such encounters can change the course of a whole life; they can give a new orientation to a career; they can open a door to someone for a problem for which he has struggled for many years without a solution. That can happen at the occasion of a visit to a friend, or during a simple conversation at the end of which someone feels lifted up, relieved and comforted, because precisely he can come through one's troubles.

Think about the encounter you have done, and which has made you what and who you are today: a husband, a wife or simply has put you in the direction you are pursuing today your career, etc. All the readings of this Sunday are talking about an encounter, namely that of God and human beings. In the first reading, the prophet Micah announces the encounter of God with his people through the care of a king God will give to his people to bring them security, prosperity and peace.

To better understand this text, we have to know its context. In fact, in that time Israel was in a very difficult political situation, experienced a moral corruption and a spiritual decadence. Offerings and sacrifices have been continually offered in the temple, but the heart of the people was far from the Lord. In order to put an end to that situation, God decides to intervene personally in order to guide his people. This intervention was through the raising of a king who would bring justice and a new leadership to Israel. He would gather all the people under his banner in the name of God. That king would not come from a big city, like Jerusalem, but from a small town of Bethlehem.

Although this prophecy was realized in the kingship of David, it is, however, true that it was in Jesus Christ that God has fulfilled once and for all his promise to save the world from sin and death. That is why, when talking about Jesus, the letter to Hebrews says that God did not approve sacrifices of animals and offerings as able to reconcile him with his people. Instead, he accepted the sacrifice of the body of Christ for the remission of the sins of the world.

Christ has not offered a material sacrifice, but said to his Father: "Here I come to do your will, O God". In this respect, he has abolished the old practice of offering sacrifices in the temple and ushered in the new times. He has eliminated all external worship of God and has established a new cult to God based on the interior conversion of heart and an authentic acceptance of God's will.

As we listen to this text, we are reminded that God's choices are directed toward the humble of heart and the simple, who are able to trust him and do his will. It is in the interior poverty that we can meet God. If our external worship is not preceded by interior dispositions of conversion and the will of transformation, we run the risk of being far from the Lord. Advent reminds us that challenge.

Because the readings of this Sunday focus on the encounter with God, the Gospel brings us to the top of a meeting, namely that of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, and by the means of the two ladies, that of Jesus and his precursor,

John the Baptist. It is here all about the meeting of two worlds, that of God, represented by Jesus in the womb of Mary, and that of human beings, represented by John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth.

From a human point of view, Mary and Elizabeth represent us as human beings, and what we are before God. Elizabeth is the symbol of all those who bear a certain hope in them, those that the Lord has consoled in their distress. Like Elizabeth, many of us have been visited by the Lord and comforted in our time of trouble and problems. How can we thank the Lord for that!

Mary is the symbol of the interior world, a world of silence, of all that we bear in us as mystery, and perhaps as problems, that nobody knows except God and people to whom we open our hearts. Mary has received great news of being the mother of the Son of God, and she bears that in her heart, like a treasure.

I wonder if a human heart is not like a vessel of mystery. Nobody knows what is in a heart of someone until the day it is revealed. I wonder if it is not human and even natural that people have secrets or an interior chamber where they keep in storage small things that nobody knows than them! Do not forget that up to now Mary's pregnancy is known only to her and her husband, Joseph! However, the Holy Spirit has revealed to Elisabeth that Mary is pregnant. As it can be seen, there is no secret for God; he knows everything about us like in an open book. This knowledge fills us with trust and confidence that we are in the hands of One who loves us and can do something for us when we are in trouble.

The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth is really interesting. Once Mary has crossed the threshold of her cousin and greeted her, the child in her womb leaped for joy. A pregnant woman knows well that when a child moves, it means that it is alive. If it is a first pregnancy and the child moves for the first time, this fact is extraordinary. But, if the pregnancy is at its sixth month and the child moves, in my view, it is no more extraordinary.

In spite of that, if Luke has kept this detail in today's Gospel, it seems to me that he wanted to tell us that Mary's visit has brought a lot of joy to Elizabeth. All this is to say, in other words, that true human encounter is that brings to others consolation, joy, peace and serenity. Mary, in turn, is reassured that she has not made a mistake by accepting the will of God in her life. Elizabeth claims that loudly as she says, "Blessed are you among women... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled".

In this Christmas' season, we too will meet many people, namely relatives and friends, and perhaps some people we do not like at all, how will our encounter with them be? Is it possible to make our gathering a moment of peace and joy? Is it possible to go beyond our differences and oppositions? May God help us celebrate Christmas with the spirit of Christ! May he bless you all!



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