

NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST C/2007

God has a plan of salvation for our world, and for each one of us. In order to fulfill this plan, God chooses men and women throughout history to whom he gives a particular mission for the good of his people. That is how he chose the great men of ancient times, like Abraham and the prophets, or Mary and Joseph, as his instruments and servants of his plan of salvation.

On this feast of the nativity of Saint John, the readings draw our attention to the fact that every vocation is a mystery whose true fabric belongs to God, and which human beings can only receive as a gift from above. The first reading describes the vocation of the prophet Isaiah, how he was chosen by the Lord from the womb of his mother to be God's messenger, in order to bring back the people of Israel scattered throughout the world, to make his glory shine at the face of the nations and his salvation reach to the ends of the earth.

Because the task the Lord gave him was difficult, he endowed him with special gifts to fit the particularity of his mission. The prophet states it clearly when he says, "He made of me a sharp-edged sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arm. He made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me". All this does not mean that the mission would be easy. It means only that whatever the situation might be, God will never abandon the prophet. That is why, as the mission of Isaiah met hardships and unsuccessful results, he found his refuge in God, knowing well that his reward is in the Lord, and his strength in the Most High.

This fate of the prophet was also that of Jesus Christ who, in spite of all his love for those the Father gave him, finished his life on the cross. But God did not leave his servant in death forever; rather he raised him up and made him king and savior. It is that fate of Jesus that Saint Paul tries to explain to the Jewish people gathered in the Synagogue. He reminds them what God did for their ancestors since their going out of Egypt. He reminds them in particular the history of David and that of John the Baptist, and how that national history culminated in Jesus Christ. In this perspective, the presence of Jesus in the world is the consummation of God's history with his people. In him, God's promise made to David has been fulfilled.

John the Baptist was sent by God to Israel in order to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus by the repentance of their sins and the reception of baptism. Although John was respected by all, in his righteousness he bore witness that Jesus was the awaited Messiah, that Jesus was greater than him to the point of being unworthy of unfastening the sandals of his feet.

But who was John the Baptist? In response to this question, the Gospel describes the circumstances under which he was born. In the whole narrative of John's birth, God appears as the gracious God who surprises human beings with his gifts, who gives beyond any merit and at a time when people hardly expect it. So were Elizabeth and Zechariah surprised by God's generosity and mercy by receiving a son to whom they gave the name of John, which means "God is gracious". It was the name which God ordered to be given to the child and it described the parent's gratitude for an unexpected joy.

Not only are John's parents amazed for what God did for them, but even the neighbors saw in this child God's blessing. They did not know yet what God has foreseen with him, but they felt that with that child something great was about to happen. All those who could recognize in this event the closeness of God were filled with joy. In fact, all those who can listen to the inner voice of God talking to their heart, can also discover the grandeur of their vocation and the reason why they have been created.

Let us consider some consequences from today's readings. The nativity of John reminds us that in every newborn, there is God's mystery. Every child is endowed with potential and gifts. It is up to parents and those surrounding the child to help him develop them. Every child is a bundle of possibilities; we never know what one of these small children of ours will turn out to be. If so, why not protect them and help them realize what God wants them to be?

Second. The entry of a child in the world is always an event of joy. It is the greatest privilege life can offer to a husband and wife. It is an opportunity to thank God for his gift, but do we realize that it creates also a responsibility to be fulfilled as parent, teacher or educator, etc? How do we fulfill our responsibility with regard to children surrounding us?

With regard to the end of the life of John who was beheaded by Herod, we learn that to be a prophet is a beautiful vocation, but it is a dangerous mission. That is why the prophet cannot always expect success in his job; what he should do is to fulfill his duty as the Lord has ordered him. At the same time, he should not be discouraged, because he knows after all that his recompense is in God, and not in his success. This was true in the past as it is today; this is also true for every vocation; think about it.

Finally, the birth of John has intervened at the time it pleased God to do so to the astonishment of his parents and the neighbors. This event teaches that God has his time to intervene in our life and to resolve the problem we are dealing with. Sometimes, we are discouraged, because we do not receive an immediate answer to our prayers. Let us not forget that God has time to visit us and he will do so according to his promise that he will be with us until the end of the world.

As the life of the prophet is the symbol of our own life, his vocation the symbol of our own, that is, a beautiful vocation, but perhaps with little success, let us bring to the Lord all our failures and hardships of our various vocations so that he may alleviate them. Let us ask him to bless us in our vocation, to give us courage to keep working for him even if we do not see success in what we do. May the Lord bless our children as we bring them in our silent prayer before him on this feast of the nativity of Saint John the Baptist. May God bless you all!



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Isaiah 49, 1-6; Acts of the Apostles 13, 22-26; Luke 1, 57-66.80