

Christmas Vigil Mass A/2010

The readings of this Christmas' eve recall the historical background of this important event that God has realized in human history. They try to bring us to the heart of what Christmas is as an expression of a profound and a joyful change that God wanted for human beings and the whole world.

In the first reading, Isaiah speaks to the people of Israel from God and promises them the end of their suffering and the change of their miserable situation. For God's sake, their fate will change forever. They will receive a new name and become a glorious crown in the hand of the Lord their God. No one will call them forsaken or desolate any more.

The Lord God himself will delight in his people and make the land his spouse. Because the Lord God will rejoice in his people, Jerusalem will shine forth before the nations like a dawn and his victory like a burning torch.

However, that change will be short lived, because time and time again Israel went into exile. Time and time again, the people went on sinning and forgot the wonderful deeds of their God. But, in all these vicissitudes of history, there was one thing that did not die, namely the hope that one day God will intervene and fulfill his promise. Do you not say sometimes that "Hope never dies"?

Well, that is exactly what happened to Israel; their hope remained alive. The speech of St Paul we heard in the Acts of the Apostles summarizes that hope of the people throughout history, namely from the choice of their ancestors, the sojourn in Egypt, the installation of David as king, the proclamation of the baptism of repentance by John, and which culminated in Jesus.

In all these important moments of the life of the nation, God has revealed himself as a savior. The good thing in all this is that what God did in the past, he is able to do again today through Jesus Christ. That is why for St Paul, Jesus is the awaited savior of Israel. He is the fulfillment of the promise made to David to make one of his descendants the savior of his people.

If such is the case, it can only be that the Gospel of this Christmas' eve presents us with the book of Jesus' genealogy that goes from Abraham to Jesus and explains how his birth took place through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The reason for Matthew's interest in the pedigrees is to help us understand that Jesus is the son of God, a true descendant of David and Abraham. He is an important person in human history, because in him God is present.

In fact, Matthew builds the pedigrees in three sections, each with fourteen generations of people in between. These sections are based on three great stages in Jewish history. The first section goes from Abraham to David; the second from David to the exile in Babylon; and the third from the return from Babylon to Jesus.

With this arrangement, Matthew intends to tell us that Jesus is the most perfect of all God's creatures. In him, God wants to achieve the harmony and the perfection he intended in his creation from all eternity.

First of all, we know that Abraham was the founding father of Israel and of the believers. We also know that David was the greatest of the kings of Israel. By linking Jesus to these great figures of Israel, Matthew would like to tell us that in Jesus we have the greatest of God's gifts to the world. Therefore, Jesus is not just anybody, but the one in whom we have access to God in a unique way. In that sense, Christmas becomes the feast of God's gift to the world and the celebration of our grandeur and our dignity as sons and daughters of God.

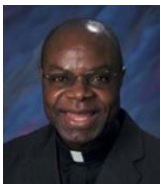
Second, it was a firm conviction in Israel that the exile was the result of the sin of the people. By invoking this negative experience of Israel, Matthew wants to tell us that Jesus comes to restore the dignity of God's children destroyed by sin. In that sense, Christmas is the celebration of the generosity of God who did not want human history to end up in tragedy. God sends his son in order to rescue us from sin and the power of evil. This benefice is given to all those who accept Jesus, change their lives and believe in him. That is the challenge of Christmas.

In the description of Jesus' genealogy, Matthew does not avoid including women, of whom some were foreigners and others less recommendable. This is amazing for a society that was exclusively masculine. In fact, the point of Matthew is to tell us that with Jesus all the barriers that divide people disappear. There is no more distinction between Jews and Gentiles, man and woman; we are all God's children. In that sense, Christmas is the celebration of our becoming God's children in Jesus.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of our savior, Jesus. It is the celebration of the mystery of his coming into our world and his dwelling among us. By becoming a man, God gives us an access to him in a more tangible way than ever. From now on, we know that God is at the heart of our world; he is involved in our history and in our lives. He is our partner forever. Our history becomes his history; our life becomes his life, and our concerns become his concerns. We cannot celebrate Christmas and forget that God is sharing with us our victories and our defeats, our successes and our failures, our joys and our sufferings.

Christmas reminds us that human fate and God's destiny are inseparable. There is no true humanism without God; there is no true worship without humanism. The service to our fellows loses its meaning when it is not founded on God. Let us rejoice in this feast of our salvation with all men and women of good will. Let us call upon Jesus to bring peace to our world. Let us not miss the opportunity to make him our savior and Lord. Peace to you with whom we gather tonight; peace to your families and your loved ones. God bless you all!

Isaiah 62, 1-5; Acts 13, 16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1, 1-25



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Contact: www.mbala.org
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