

Fourth Sunday of Advent C/2012

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Advent prepare us for the celebration of Christmas. They talk about the encounter between God and human beings symbolized by the meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist in the wombs of their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth. They invite us, in particular, to realize that when we meet God, our life changes, because, instead of sadness and bitterness, he gives us peace and joy.

The first reading of Micah is about the announcement of a new kingship in Israel. It describes the promise God made to raise a king from the clan of Judah and the city of Bethlehem to rule his people. It shows that the new king will stand firm and shepherd his flock in the name of God. His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth and he himself will be peace.

What is behind this text is the idea of the fulfillment of God's promise made to Israel to give them a Messiah. Another idea is about the identity and the origin of the Messiah which, though eternal, is linked to the house of David. The text presupposes also that the kingship in Israel was seen as an exercise of power, but in the name of God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it talks about the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. First of all, the Gospel says that Mary went in haste to pay a visit to Elizabeth. Once she came to her home and greeted her, the baby in the womb of Elizabeth leaped for joy.

Spontaneously, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and started praising Mary for what God has done for her. She acknowledged that Mary was blessed among all the women as well as the son she bore in her womb was blessed. She acknowledged also that Mary was blessed because of her faith in God. Finally, she expressed her astonishment about the humility of Mary who, though being the mother of her Lord, has dared to pay her a visit.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to bring is the paradox of blessedness. What do I mean by that? In fact, Elizabeth calls Mary blessed, because the son she bore in her womb was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. She calls her also blessed, because Mary believed God and everything of what he told her.

It is certainly true that Mary has received a great blessing for being chosen by God among all the women to be the mother of Jesus, his Son. There is no doubt that such a position is a great privilege and a motive of joy. However, this privilege and joy are challenging because, according to the words of Simeon in the temple, a sword will one day pierce the heart of Mary as she will contemplate her son, Jesus, hanging on the cross.

In that perspective, I can say that to be chosen by God is a great privilege, but it is at the same time a demanding task. God does not choose us for an easy and comfortable joy, but for a task that will take all that the head, the heart and the hands can bring to it. After all, God chooses us in order to use us as his instruments at his will and not in order to let us be tranquil.

As Jesus says, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Luke 12, 48b). In that sense, the privilege of being chosen is a joy, but is a demanding joy. The same is true for any

blessing we receive from God. We do not receive a blessing in order to grip our hands on it, but in order to become, in turn, a blessing to others. That is why, to be blessed is a privilege, but it is challenging to transform it into a blessing for others.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the right attitudes we need in order to have a wonderful Christmas. Please, do not get me wrong as though some Christmases are not wonderful. What I want to say is just that some attitudes make the celebration of Christmas more beautiful and enjoyable than others.

Which ones, then, contribute to make Christmas beautiful and enjoyable? Let us turn to the two ladies we have in today's Gospel, namely Mary and Elizabeth. In fact, once Mary heard the good news that her cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant after many years of barren life, she decided to go and visit her.

What did drive her was the sense of solidarity. She wanted to live in solidarity with her cousin and to show that she cared. As she had shared her moment of sadness for being barren, now she wanted to share with her this moment of joy as she bore a baby.

So, once she crossed the threshold of Elizabeth and greeted her, the baby in her womb jumped. A pregnant woman knows that when a baby moves, it means that it is alive. If it is a first pregnancy and the baby moves for the first time, this fact is extraordinary. But, if the pregnancy is at its sixth month and the baby moves, it is no more extraordinary. In spite of that, if Luke has kept this detail in today's Gospel, it seems he wanted to tell us that Mary's visit has brought a lot of joy to Elizabeth.

As Mary showed her solidarity, Elizabeth in turn offered her hospitality. As she did, the Holy Spirit revealed to her the secret that Mary had in her heart, namely that she was pregnant too, with the Son of God. In fact, when we welcome people who visit us with the Spirit of Jesus, God blesses us. That is the experience Elizabeth has done and by the end of which, she could claim loudly, "Blessed are you among women... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled".

This Christmas season people will come to visit us, some of whom we do not like at all, like the mother-in-law or the father-in-law, the daughter-in-law or the son-in-law, the sister-in-law or the brother-in-law. How wonderful would it be that we treat them with the spirit of Mary and Elizabeth! Let us, then, accept to celebrate this Christmas at the example of Mary and Elizabeth, all welcoming, peaceful and joyful! May God bless you all!

Micah 5: 1-4a; Hebrews 10: 5-10; Luke 1: 39-45



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