

Christmas Vigil C/2015

The readings on this Christmas vigil describe the event of the birth of Jesus. They draw our attention to the fact that the birth of Jesus is the beginning of the redemption of the world and the fulfillment of God's plan to save us. They invite us, in particular, to celebrate this event with joy knowing that with the incarnation of Jesus in the world, our salvation has started.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah announces a change in the life of Israel after the return from exile. It shows that Israel will become a brilliant land at the sight of nations and kings. It shows also that while its destiny will change, it will receive a new name and become a glorious crown in the hands of God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is capable of changing human history by bringing it from defeat to victory, from sadness to joy. Another idea is the truth that where God is involved everything changes for the best for the good of his people.

This text allows us to understand the core message of today's Gospel as it relates the birth of Jesus. First of all, the Gospel starts with the description of the genealogy of Jesus. It shows that, considering the unfolding of the history of Israel, Jesus Christ is a true descendant of David and of Abraham.

Then, it builds the genealogy by referring to the three main periods that depict the history of Israel, namely from Abraham to David, from David to the exile in Babylon, and from the return from exile in Babylon to the birth of Jesus. The Gospel shows also that between each of these periods of history, fourteen generations of people have been involved until it culminated in the birth of Jesus.

After that, the Gospel relates the event of the birth of Jesus by showing how Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, became pregnant through the action of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Gospel accounts of the reaction of Joseph who wanted to divorce Mary and how an angel explained to him the whole affair by asking him to keep her. In the end, the Gospel mentions that all that happened according to the prophecy of Isaiah, namely that a virgin will conceive and bear a son to whom they will give the name of Immanuel.

What do we learn from this feat? Today I want to talk about Jesus Christ as the reason of the existence of human history. What do I mean by that? In fact, when I was reading the genealogy of Jesus, I was struck by the fact that, while history was unfolding from Abraham to David until the exile in Babylon, nobody knew what would be the end of its direction. But God knew, in his plan, that all that history had a purpose, namely that one day it would culminate in Jesus.

The same logic appears clearly behind the reasoning of St Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, St Paul seems to say that, since the choice of their ancestors, their sojourn in Egypt and the raising of David as king, God has prepared Jesus to be the fulfillment of his promise to give to Israel a savior. According to that reasoning, Jesus is the reason why the history of Israel was in the making. In that perspective, Christmas is the culmination of salvation history and the fulfillment of God's promise to his people.

We have to remember, however, that history contains three important moments, namely the past, the present and the future. We count these three moments according to the human calendar, because it is for us human beings that there is a past, a present and a future. For God, on the contrary, everything is perpetually eternal. If God had an intention to save in the past, that intention remains true even today.

In that sense, the coming of Jesus in the world is the manifestation of God's intention to save us. It is that will of God to save us that we celebrate in the feast of Christmas. Christmas, then, is the celebration of the mystery of Jesus' coming into our world and his dwelling among us. From now on, we know that God is at the heart of our world; he is involved in our history and in our lives. Our history becomes his history; our life becomes his life, and our concerns become his concerns. The challenge we have at Christmas is that of accepting to let our personal history be transformed by God's history.

If we accept, then, Jesus becomes the game changer of our history and that of the world. In politics, when people talk about the game changer, they mean the important moment that makes the election change its course in favor of one or another candidate. The incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world is one of the greatest events that have changed forever the face of the universe. Before Jesus Christ, and after Jesus Christ, human history is not the same anymore. Something has changed for good, for us and for our world. We cannot live as though Jesus has never existed.

Christmas reminds us that we have to live not only according to human patterns, but also according to God's law. Anytime we try to separate God and human being, the divine and the human, we overlook the truth that God has become one of us to make us divine. Christmas reminds us that human fate and God's destiny are inseparable. There is no true humanity without worship of God; there is no true worship without the service of our fellow humans. The service of our fellow humans loses its meaning when it is not founded on the love God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

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 those you love in your hearts. God bless you all! Merry Christmas to all of you!

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



Homily Date: December 24, 2015
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20151224homily.pdf