

Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist B2018

The readings of this feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist talk about the vocation of the prophet and the sense of his mission. They also shed light on our own vocation by reminding us that we have all been called to serve the Lord and to be his servants since our birth.

The first reading talks about the vocation and the mission of the prophet Isaiah. It describes how God chose him since he was formed in the womb of his mother, gave him a name and destined him to be a light to the nations. It also shows that his mission was to gather and bring back the people of Israel to God. Finally, the text shows that God endowed him with gifts and reassured him for the success of his mission.

What is behind this text is the idea that the vocation of a prophet is part of God's plan of salvation he has prepared before the birth of his servant. There is also the idea that God reassures and rewards those chosen to work for him.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as it speaks of the birth and the mission of John the Baptist. The Gospel starts with the event of the birth of John and what happened to his father Zechariah and his mother Elizabeth at that time. Then, it speaks about the injunctions received by Elizabeth from an angel about the name of John to be given to the baby. The gospel ends up with the healing of Zechariah and the mention of the growing of the child under God's guidance.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the mystery of a vocation. Let me start this way. Sometimes people ask me, when did you really know that you would become a priest? Bluntly, my answer very often has been short and like this: "I do not know".

In truth, what I do is to explain to them my past background as being born in a Catholic family, having been an altar boy and a member of our Parish choir. Then, I say that the spiritual environment in which I grew up has played a big role in my determination to become priest. What I do, in fact, is to give a human account of my vocation. But, such an account is partial because many young men of my age who had been in the same situation like me did not become priests.

Such a consideration shows that behind my vocation, there was an invisible hand of God who guided me through those human circumstances to become a priest. I believe that this is what the prophet Isaiah had in mind when he states his vocation by saying: "The Lord called me from birth; from my mother's womb he gave me a name".

Such a consideration shows that any vocation has two faces, namely a human face which we tell in the account of our human history. It also has a spiritual face that is hidden in the invisible hand of God who works through human circumstances.

That is what appeared in the life of John the Baptist. God prepared him since his conception in the womb of his mom for a plan he had in his mind, namely to be a precursor to Jesus.

Such interpretation leads to the concept of God's time. As the Gospel says, when the time arrived, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. This is not a human time, but God's time. God's time is very different from the human calendar. In that sense, the birth of John

happened at the time it pleased God to put end to the barrenness of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

The English concept of time has just one use: the time as we know it. The Greeks have two perceptions when they talk about time. There is *chronos*: that is the time counted as succession of events. From there comes our English word *chronology*. But, there is also *Kairos*: That is the time of fulfillment of an expected event.

John's birth teaches us that God has his time to intervene in our life and to resolve the problem we are dealing with. We might be discouraged or disappointed when things do not work as we wish, at our rhythm. But, God has his time to intervene and console us.

Meanwhile, what happens is that we are wrapped in a complete mystery about us and what lies before us. We do not know when God's time can be fulfilled. I highlight this in order to make us also aware of the mystery of the future of any person and any child. When God's time is fulfilled, things happen.

In fact, in today's Gospel I am struck by the reaction from the people of Zechariah's village: "What, then, will this child be"? Such a reaction shows that the coming into the world of a newborn is always a mystery.

There is the story of a Latin teacher who always bowed before his students before teaching them. When asked why he was doing so, he answered that it is because you never know what one of these students will be in life.

That is true for each one of us, as well as for many great people we remember in human history. They were all small babies, but who, by growing, have marked human history, in a special way. That is why we have to understand that each child deserves not only to be protected, but also that in each one of them there is a great potential that we, as adults, have to develop.

Imagine if our parents did not care at all about us, how we would have been lost. How much would be lost in the world if we did not exist? All that brings before us the question of responsibility we have for our children.

In fact, to be parents is a great joy, but it creates a responsibility. Today as we celebrate the birthday of John the Baptist, we are reminded about our responsibility as parents, catechists, educators, priests, etc. Let us pray for all the children of the world, especially those whose parents are divorced and those who flee wars and immigrate. Let us ask God to help us fulfill our duties with the grace he gives us through the sacraments of the Church. Let us ask him to help us protect human life and our children for the future of the Church and of the world. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 49: 1-6; Acts 13: 22-26; Luke 1: 57-66, 80

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