

Fourth Sunday of Advent C2018

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, peaceful, shepherd his flock in the name of God and his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

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. The Gospel starts with the visit of Mary to her cousin, Elizabeth.

It shows how Mary greeted her and the baby in her womb leaped for joy. It also shows how Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, started praising Mary for her faith and for what God has done for her.

The Gospel accounts equally about the acknowledgement of Elizabeth over the blessedness of Mary and of her son. Finally, the Gospel expresses the astonishment of Elizabeth over the humility of Mary who paid her a visit.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about 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 also calls her 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.

Moreover, blessedness commands some attitudes that make us attentive to God's grace within us and which we really need at this Christmas time. In order to appreciate those attitudes, let us turn to Mary and Elizabeth.

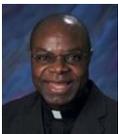
In fact, once Mary heard the good news that her cousin was pregnant after many years of barren life, she decided to go and visit her. What did drive her was the spirit of solidarity. She wanted to show that she cared and takes part in her sorrows and her joys.

This spirit of solidarity we need a lot at this time where everybody looks, first, for his own interests. 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, many different people will come to visit us. It might be some we do not like or wish to meet. 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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