

Christmas at the Vigil Mass A/2019

The readings of this Christmas Eve describe the historical context of the birth of Jesus. They show us that, through the birth of Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise to send a savior to the world and brought joy to humankind.

The first reading describes the prophecy of Isaiah about the future of Israel. It shows the change that will happen affecting the city of Jerusalem and its population. It equally shows that Jerusalem will take an aura of glory at the admiration of kings and nations as God himself will delight in his people. Finally, the text highlights how that change will affect the land and the fate of all the people in it.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is able to put an end to the suffering of his people. Another idea is that when God visits his people, their entire situation changes for the best. The last idea is related to the truth that God brings joy to his people.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it speaks of the birth of Jesus Christ. First of all, the Gospel starts with the book of the genealogy of Jesus by showing that Jesus is the Son of God and the descendant of David and Abraham. It shows how, through the meander of the history of Israel, God's plan to give a savior to the world has been fulfilled. It also shows how through the different personalities who have shaped the history of Israel, God has prepared the event of Jesus' birth.

After that, the Gospel recalls the birth of Jesus as it took place through the power of the Holy Spirit while Mary and Joseph were just fiancés and not living together. It equally shows the particular role God's angel played in reassuring Joseph and keeping him on the right track of obedience and surrendering to the will of God. Finally, the Gospel recalls the name given to the baby before his birth and his own birth as a fulfillment of the prophecies announced in the past.

What do we learn from this Gospel? On this Christmas Eve where our attention is fixed on the event of the birth of Jesus, I want to talk about the journey of God in human history. In fact, nowadays and in our country, there is a growing interest in the family tree. People want to know the history of the journey of their family, their ancestors and their relatives. They want to know who they are, to whom they are related and how they have become who they are today.

By looking back in the family tree, people learn more of themselves and their family. They discover that the family is like a rich web that, over the years, has mingled different persons in order to come to them.

Moreover, people discover in the family tree very important persons as well as some less commendable, like criminals, prostitutes, thieves, etc. But, all these are part of our family and its journey. We cannot disown our history and our family because of bad things that our ancestors have done; on the contrary, everything in it is part of who we are today.

As it is for human beings, so it is for Jesus. In fact, the Gospel of this Christmas Eve focuses on the family tree of Jesus. We find in it great people, but also less commendable ones, like the wife of Uriah that David killed in order to appropriate her. And yet, it was from those people that Jesus came in the flesh.

Now, here is the question. Why are we told all this history at the birth of Jesus? The intention is certainly threefold. First, the Scriptures want to tell us that Jesus is a real person and not a phantom. He is not a myth, but a person whose history can be traced back to thousands of years of human history.

Second, they want to show us what a long journey, made up of ups and downs, God has made in order to meet us. Therefore, God is not afraid of our failures or infidelities. He wants to heal them. The ups and the downs of our life are part of our human history; they cannot stop God from loving us and coming to us.

That is the reason why God has sent Jesus into the world, so that by becoming one of us and sharing in our human history, we too may become divine. In that sense, we are not called to live in mediocrity, but to overcome it in order to be better persons. Therefore, we have to aspire to the best in us and to give the best of us in everything we do.

Third, by showing us the family tree of Jesus with its beauty and its ugliness, the Scriptures want to show us that God's love is bigger than human sin. Nothing, even ugly sin, will ever stop God from loving us. Even when society rejects us because of our past or our deeds, God still loves us. What great News that God loves us beyond anything.

That is why the words of Isaiah heard in the first reading are destined for us tonight: "You shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the Lord. ... No more shall you be "forsaken". ... "You shall be called "My delight", because God rejoices in you. If you understand all that, my friends, you certainly realize that Christmas is the celebration of God's love to the world, a love that is stronger than human sin.

We are here tonight in order to celebrate this great event of the love of God we call Christmas. We are celebrating a great mystery of love that has led God to us in spite of our sins. Because God loves us, let us love him in turn by living, not according to the world standard, but according to God's own Laws.

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.

The baby Jesus is inviting us to love him because he loves us. May he bless all the children throughout the world! May he bring peace into our hearts and our families tonight! Merry Christmas to each one of you!

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



Homily Date: December 24, 2019
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20191224homily.pdf