

## Fourth Sunday of Advent A2022

Let me start this homily with an observation. The majority of our congregation here present is made up of farmers. One of the things I learned is that many farmers have partners with whom they work. The advantage of partnership is that it helps the farmers share the financial burden, the work force and become strong in remaining in alliances.

That is what happened to Israel as we heard in the first reading. At that time, Israel was under the threat of neighboring enemies and run the risk of losing its freedom. Pushed by these events, the King Ahaz made a treaty with the Assyrians in order to save the country. The problem, however, is that, with regard to God's promise of being the unique protector of his people, such a treaty was like counting more on human power than on divine help.

For that reason, God sent the prophet Isaiah to exhort the king to not miss the opportunity of asking a sign from God and to prove the accuracy of his promise. However, since the king had already his plan, he hid himself behind a false piety by declaring that he will not tempt the Lord. Nevertheless, the prophet reassured him that because he was afraid, God himself would give him a sign. The king will have a powerful descendant, born from a virgin, who will be named Emmanuel, and who will put an end to any danger threatening his people.

Beyond the prospect envisaged by Ahaz, God's project of salvation was not destined to Israel alone, but rather to the whole world. That is why Matthew in today's Gospel presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, but which at the same time goes beyond it.

Therefore, Jesus is the descendant of the royal family, a son of the promise; he is both man and God. He is conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit and without human intervention. He is the son of Mary, but he is also fully divine. The fact that Mary has conceived without a human intervention is an evident sign that for God nothing is impossible. As God acted in the past by making the impossible possible, so he does today for those who trust him.

Joseph, instructed by the angel, had to accept God's mystery manifested in the pregnancy of Mary, her fiancée. He had to keep his wife with him and give a name to the child once he was born. If Mary had received the mission of bringing Jesus to the world, it was, however, to Joseph that was assigned the mission of giving the name to Jesus and to insert him in his descendants as the fulfillment of the prophecies. Here we see how Mary and Joseph complete each other as parents of Jesus, even if in the popular devotion the place of Joseph does not appear so clearly.

The name Joseph gives to the Infant shows the mission this extraordinary child has to fulfill: "Emmanuel, which means "God is with us": Jesus is the child who brings God close to the world. In him, the Father is present and fulfills his plan of salvation for mankind. Through Jesus Christ, God has chosen to dwell in our world and to become one of us, a human being. This makes the grandeur of Christianity, namely that we are not worshipping a remote God, a God who can be found in a stone or the wind or nature, but a personal God who wants to save us.

The name of Emmanuel given to Jesus does not mean only that God is with us, but also that he is at our side anywhere and everywhere. He is in our hopes and our struggles, our joys and our sorrows, sharing with us each moment of our life, our ups and downs.

It is that mystery of Jesus that Saint Paul is talking about in the second reading. For St Paul, Jesus is a descendant of David according to the flesh, but the Son of God by the power of Holy Spirit. That mystery of Jesus was already announced by the prophet, and his mission today, as apostle as well as to each one of us, is to make it known to the nations.

Why are we told the story of Jesus as we approach the feast of Christmas? For two reasons: first, that by accepting it we too come to the obedience of faith and the recognition in our hearts that in Jesus God has become one of us in order to save us. Second, by accepting the word of Jesus, we might be sanctified by the grace of his Holy Spirit.

Now, let me finish with two remarks. We saw in the first reading that the king Ahaz, in spite of the assurance of Isaiah, could not dare ask a sign to God. By acting so, he surely wanted to resolve his problem alone, without recourse to God.

Ahaz is the symbol of modern man who thinks that, because he lives in the culture that wants to control everything, he can live without God. The truth, however, is that there are things we can do on our own; there are some others for which we need God's help. To count on God does not diminish our responsibility. As Isaiah says, "Lord, You mete out peace to us, for it is you who have accomplished all that we have done" (Is 26, 12).

The second remark is about Joseph. We saw in the Gospel that Joseph had a plan of marriage with Mary. But suddenly that plan was disturbed by God's plan on Mary. As a just man, Joseph accepted in faith what God asked him to do. My point is this: as Christmas season comes up, you will certainly meet people you do not like at all. How ready are you to accept to be disturbed by these people? How can the example of Joseph help you accept to be disturbed in your Christmas plan? Would you like Christmas to be a joy only for you alone or would like also to share that joy with others? May the example of Mary and Joseph help us welcome God's grace by welcoming each other at this Christmas Season! God bless you!

### **Isaiah 7: 10-14; Romans 1: 1-7; Mathew 1: 18-24**



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