

Fourth Sunday of Advent C2024

This is the last Sunday of Advent, the one that prepares us directly for Christmas. I guess by now we should have done with our shopping and plans. I guess also that we are more open to think about the true meaning of this Christmas Season.

This last Sunday all our eyes are on Mary and Elizabeth, two cousins who invite us to learn from them what it means to be prepared for the encounter with the Lord. From them we can also learn how God interacts with us and let himself found in the ordinary circumstances of life, with all its ups and downs. Their attitudes toward one another can teach us a lot about God and fellow human beings.

Let me start with a simple observation. Life is made of up of encounters, some of which are decisive and crucial for the orientation of our future. Think about the encounter you have had and which has opened up your life, and made of you a husband or a wife you are today. Think about the encounter you have done in particular circumstances of life and which have been crucial in the decision you made to pursue your career in the direction it is today.

Any encounter can change us, for better or for worse; it can make us happy or unhappy men. When God encountered Mary through the angel Gabriel, her life was changed. She became the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, the savior of the world. When Elizabeth encountered God through the apparition of the angel, she became the mother of John the Baptist, the precursor of our Lord Jesus. There is no encounter that is neutral. Any encounter leaves its impact on us.

By describing the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth, the Gospel brings us to the top of an encounter between God, represented by Jesus in the womb of Mary, and human beings, represented by John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth.

Mary and Elizabeth represent us as human beings, and what we are before God. Elizabeth is the symbol of all those who bear in their heart a certain hope that something good will end up happening to them. She is the symbol of those that the Lord has consoled in their distress and suffering. Like Elizabeth, many of us have been visited by the Lord, blessed and consoled in our time of trouble and problems. How grateful and thankful shall we be to God!

Mary is the symbol of the interior world, a world of silence, of all that we bear within us as mystery, and perhaps as problems, that nobody knows except God and people to whom we open our hearts. Mary has received the great news of being the mother of the Son of God, and she bears all that in her heart, like a treasure, in silence.

I believe that "human heart is like a vase of mystery". Nobody knows what is in the heart of someone until the day it is revealed. I wonder if it is not human and even natural that people have secrets or an interior chamber where they keep in storage small things that nobody knows than them! However, all that cannot be hidden to God.

Look how the Holy Spirit of God revealed to Elizabeth that Mary was pregnant. As it can be seen, there is no secret for God; he knows everything about us like in an open book. He knows the color of our skin, the tint of our eyes, the form of our body, the shape of our size.

That knowledge fills us with awe, trust and confidence that we are in the hands of one who loves us, understands us and can do something for us when we are in trouble. As the Dutch Priest Writer, Henry Nouwen, once wrote: “Long before anyone heard us cry or laugh, we were heard by our God, who is all ears for us. Long before any person spoke to us in this world, we were spoken to by the voice of eternal love”.

Let us go back again to the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth. The Gospel says that once Mary crossed the threshold of her cousin and greeted her, the child in her womb leaped for joy. What did drive Mary to visit Elizabeth was the sense of solidarity. She wanted to live in solidarity with her cousin and to show that she cared. As she had shared her moments of sadness for being barren, now she wanted to share her moments of joy as she bore a baby. 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 of being pregnant with the Son of God.

When we welcome peacefully those who come to us, with the spirit of Mary and Elizabeth, God blesses us. That is the experience Elizabeth has done and which each one of us can also do if one is opened to God’s grace that comes to us through the visitors. At the occasion of that visit, Elizabeth claimed loudly, “Blessed are you among women (...) Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled”. The secret of the pregnancy of Mary was revealed to her and great joy was brought to her through the movement of the baby in her womb.

How wonderful it would be that, in this Christmas season as families and friends, we could bring joy and peace to one another! How wonderful it would be that, when friends and families visit us, they can find us peaceful and joyful, and not aggressive and rejecting! This Christmas’ season, we too will meet many people, relatives and friends, and perhaps some we do not like at all, how will our encounter with them be? Is it possible to make our gathering a moment of peace and joy? Is it possible to go beyond our differences and oppositions? Can we accept to celebrate Christmas with the spirit of Mary and Elizabeth?

Micah 5: 1-4a; Hebrews 10: 5-10; Luke 1: 39-45



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