

Christmas Vigil B/2017

The birth of Jesus Christ is one of the greatest events that have changed human history. Before Jesus Christ and after Jesus Christ, human history is not the same anymore. The readings we have on this Christmas vigil draw our attention to the birth of Jesus as the beginning of our redemption and the fulfillment of God's promise to send the savior to the world.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah describes the historical context of the Jewish people in the period preceding the birth of Jesus. It shows how the prophet tried to rekindle the hope and faith of the people in God. It shows in particular the prayer Isaiah offered for the people by reminding them of the love of God and his promise of blessing to them.

What is behind this text is the idea that whatever might be the suffering of God's people, it will not endure eternally. On the contrary, God will intervene and put an end to it. Another idea is the fact that God, in his faithfulness, will never abandon his people and the land he has chosen. The last idea is related to the truth that God will always keep his promise and save his people.

This text allows understanding the stakes of today's Gospel on Christmas' eve. First of all, the Gospel starts with the enumeration of the family tree of Jesus. It begins with Abraham and finishes with Joseph, the legal father of Jesus. It subdivides the ancestors of Jesus in three sections, each with fourteen generations of people in between, namely from Abraham to David; from David to the exile in Babylon and from the return from Babylon to Jesus.

After that, the Gospel gives an account of the birth of Jesus. It shows how, while Mary, his mother, was betrothed to Joseph, they found her pregnant with a baby through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then, the Gospel reports on how, while Joseph planned to divorce Mary, the angel of God intervened and dissuaded him to do so. Finally, the Gospel reports on the instructions the angel gave to Joseph about the baby, Jesus.

What do we learn from this Gospel? This evening, on the solemnity of the birth of Jesus, I want to talk about Christmas as the celebration of the gift of life.

In fact, we are used to receiving gifts from friends and families. This Christmas will not be different in this way. Each gift has a story linked to it; because it reminds us of particular relationships we have with people who, on this particular moment of our life, want to show that they care for us, how we are important to them or how, for one reason or another, they are grateful to us.

It is impossible to look at any gift without reminding us of a story of a relationship that ties us to the givers of the gift. Because each gift has a story, it is unique; because each gift is unique, it is meaningful. Without speaking, a gift bears a language of love and relationship.

By giving us his son, God shows that he loves us. Sometimes, people say that "the best comes in the end". When we read the family tree of Jesus with all the meander of its human history, we realize that God in his plan wanted eventually to give to the world the best of his gifts, Jesus Christ, the life of the world. Please, welcome tonight God's gift of life, in Jesus born for us.

Moreover, each gift received brings us joy, happiness and contentment because not only does it show that someone is thoughtful about us, but also it shows that he holds us in esteem. However, whatever might be the satisfaction and the joy we feel when we receive human gifts, we know by experience that there is a deep longing in each one of us that a simple gift cannot completely satisfy.

That is why even when we receive gifts, we still are hungry for more; we need to have as many gifts as possible. That longing for more and for the best of the gifts is what God wants to fulfill at Christmas by giving us a gift that is beyond any other, namely his son, Jesus.

In fact, the coming into the world of any child is a gift of life. It is just a question of looking at the parents when they have their first baby. The presence of another being into their life changes everything for them: their approach to life, the meaning they give to it, their perspectives for the future, etc.

By giving us the gift of his son, God shows that he cares for us and holds us in high esteem. He wants us to know that we are important to him and he loves us. We might not be aware of his love and concern for us, but at Christmas he makes that love and concern visible through the sending of his son into the world to be our savior.

That is why the name of God's gift to us is Emmanuel, meaning God is with us. In Jesus, indeed, God is truly with us, sharing our life and willing that we become divine like him who became human so that we become like him. Because God loves us, we have to love him in turn and live by his commands.

Anytime we pass over his commands, we hurt our relationship with him and God is a little bit sad that we do not care. That is why we have to live not only according to human patterns, but also according to God's law. Anytime we forget that God cares for us, we betray his love for us. Anytime we want independent life without God, we deny his gift to us. Because he gives us his gift so that we live by it and are happy.

Let us rejoice in this feast of our salvation with all men and women of good will. Let us call upon Jesus to bring peace to our world, our country, our families and our homes. Let us not miss the opportunity to make him our savior and Lord. Peace to you with whom we gather tonight! Peace to all those you love in your hearts! May God bless you all!

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

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