



Lectio Divina. Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

Songkoy (Philippines), SR. LILLY CHALAKKAL OP, December 20, 2020.- Are you confused? The Holy Spirit will guide you. Are you troubled? Be in solitude, God will reveal to you His Plan. Have you felt uncertain in life? The Lord is with you...He is certain ...have faith in Him...

GOSPEL

Luke 1: 26-38. THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his Father David ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" ³⁵ And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.³⁶ And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

THE STUDY OF THE TEXT

The Gospel text of today is about the biggest day the world has ever known. The Annunciation to Mary. This was the beginning of a new point in history, in a small village, involving an unknown woman and vague promises from an angel.

Her condition as **virgin** was emphasized twice in the same verse. The word Mary is the equivalent of Miriam (Ex15:20) the word Mary means “**exalted one**”. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, who belongs to the house of David is emphasized. The evangelist has a plan for it, it is through Joseph, that Jesus belonging to the family of David is assured.

The unique selection of Mary...and Gabriel’s unique salutation... **Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you.** The greeting of the angel is not conventional or straight. The more usual greeting in the New Testament is “eirene”, peace (Lk 10:5; 24:36; Jn 20:19). It is the translation of the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’ or Aramaic ‘Selan’. ‘Chaire’ (Rejoice) is the invitation to Messianic joy. In the prophecies of Zephaniah (3:1-17) and Zachariah (2:10); we see Zion is invited to Messianic joy.

In Mary these prophecies about the daughter of Zion is being fulfilled at the moment of the annunciation. She is the daughter of Zion, the personification of the people of God, to whom God has given the great vocation of bringing forth the Messiah. Now this mission is entrusted to us, how can we bring the Messiah to others? Do we accept the vocation as bearers of God, and rejoice?

The Lord is with you... With this greeting, the evangelist puts Mary in the group of those who are called by God to fulfill a special mission in the history of Israel. The Lord God is not just with her, but comes to dwell in her, within her womb, in person. And Jesus is identified with Lord God, the Saviour of Zion spoken by the prophets. It is an invitation to us to allow God to be with us for the call is to say yes to His will.

She was **greatly troubled** at the saying and considered in her mind **what sort of greeting this might be.** Since she lived praying and meditating on the Scriptures, she was serene and had an intuition of the immensity of what was being revealed to her. In this gracious instance ‘God was transforming her, raising her to a new kind of existence, capable of new heights of hope and love, and a new relationship with God and all. She has chosen as the focal point of the redemptive plan of God’. She was pondering within herself what she had heard...it is in our silence and solitary moments that God reveals to us His plan. How do we react, do we ponder, see it in the light of the Word of God?

The Angel Said to her, “**Do not be afraid, Mary**” for you have found **favor with God.** This verse proposes God’s words to Moses. “I know you by your name and you have won my favor”. (Ex 33:12-17). Noah also found favor with God (Gen 6:8). Mary was chosen by God to bestow His favor to her. The unrepeatably unique favor to be the Mother of His Son.

The angel continues his message, **You will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus.** The son of God could not have had two fathers. His filiation

is unique. Jesus' human birth through the virginal conception was only the manifestation of His unique eternal filiation. There is a close relationship between the virginal conception of Jesus and his Divine filiation. This we see in the first half of v.1:35, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you". It obviously speaks of the virginal conception through the power of the Holy Spirit. The second part v.35, announces also a virgin birth, 'the child to be born will be called holy'. The word 'holy' in this instance informs us about the manner in which the child will be born that is to say in a 'holy' manner set apart for God. This is why the one who will be born will be called Son of God. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

He will be Great...Son of the Most High, The title 'great' is an attribute of God and His works (Ps 48:1). The qualities of the Son to be born are: He would be great, the Son of the Most High, He would be given the throne of David, He would reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom would be no end. In the NT it is applied to Jesus (Tit 2:13; Heb 4:14; 13:20). Prophets foretold both, the coming of a man chosen by God, the Messiah (2Sam 7:12-14; Lk 1:33), and the eschatological manifestation of YHWH Himself. These two comings are fulfilled in the birth of Jesus from Mary because He was to be both the Messiah and God Himself.

Mary said to the Angel, 'How can this be. Since I have no husband? Mary is asking how it is possible for her to have a child and yet fulfill her desire to belong to God totally by her decision to remain a virgin always. God preserved Mary from sin and concupiscence from the very first moment of her life through the gift of the 'Immaculate Conception' because of the fact that she was to become the Mother of the Son of God, virginally.

The angel said to her, The **Holy Spirit will come upon you...the Son of God.** Answering Mary's objection 'how' about the conception of the Messiah the angel gives the Christological aspect of Jesus' identity. Mary asks how it will take place. But does not ask for a sign and she does not doubt that it will be fulfilled and accepts without hesitation the mission assigned to her. Mary is a virgin, who has not known man, and therefore the child is totally God's work, a new creation. The action of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High came not upon the descendent of the throne of David, but upon his Mother. God's Son was begotten in the womb of Mary through God's creative Spirit and she became the tabernacle where God dwells.

The angel continued, "Behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For **with God nothing will be impossible.**" Mary is given a sign and the angel told her of God's favor to her relative. If Elizabeth who was barren was with child, then Mary could be sure that what had been told to her would also be fulfilled. This verse reminds us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of the blessings to all humanity made to Abraham.

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; **Let it be to me according to your word.**” Mary’s reaction is that of Hannah (1 Sam1:11). At the words pronounced by Mary, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). This enabled God to inaugurate the new creation and the fulfillment of all the promises of Old Testament. These words of Mary in reply to the angel’s announcement are the most important words ever pronounced by a human being in the history of mankind and in the history of salvation. ‘Let it be to me according to your word,’ is a common phrase in Scriptures. These words on the lips of Mary symbolizes her complete acceptance of the Word of God which she had heard. She gives her whole-hearted consent, and declared her total availability and active readiness towards God. The words of Mary does not express simply a humble submission, but a prayer and a sentiment of joy. It was not a burdensome or painful submission, but a joyous desire to accept the will of God.

The story of Jesus’ conception is concluded by Mary’s response, Mary’s willing response. Let it be to me according to your word, confirms Mary’s unique role in the fulfillment of Gods promise.

REFLECTION

In Jesus our Transcendent God is ever close and within our reach. Whatever situations we are, if we are unable to experience God’s presence, it is only because of our lack of faith. But He is there, He manifests to us in many different and multiple ways. He is there to protect us from all dangers, He is there to save us. He sustains us safe even in the midst of natural and manmade calamities, or pandemics or its far reaching consequences of suffering, pain, isolation, loss of loved ones...He is there to comfort us, to reassure us, ‘Be not afraid’, “the Lord is with you”. What a comforting and consoling presence, empowering presence that encourages us to endure in faith, trust and hope. God asks us just to believe in Him without looking for reason... Trust in His Gospel.

The angel’s message to Mary, ‘**Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you...nothing is impossible with God.**’ Mary is filled with full of grace, God’s favor and graciousness. Something which she has no way earned, but which was given as a gratuitous gift by God. Gabriel said to Mary that the Lord is literally with her. She is the new ark, and a tent and temple. God is physically in her, thus, she is a greater house of God promised to David. ‘With’ means we will never be alone “the Kingdom of God is at hand” Jesus proclaims and His life testifies to that. The love, peace, joy, justice, equality, all that Jesus envisioned is here. In Jesus God is ever close always within reach. But still we must reach out to Him. ‘With’ cannot be a one way relationship. It has to be two way, God and us.

“With’ is an enduring presence through our ups and downs, God journeys with us. But we must also journey with Him, remember that Emmanuel is not just God –with-me but God with us. God is concerned not just with my dreams and my desires; God sees the community

around us. ‘With’ means being assured of support but ‘With’ also means being ready for challenge. We must always be going and growing towards God; when challenges make us uncertain in life and looking for answers, let’s turn to Mary, our Blessed Mother, model of our faith and she will intercede for us to her Son Jesus. He is the answer...

This is what ‘with’ means ...this is what the Annunciation and Mystery of Incarnation means. God pitched His tent among us and dwelt among us to show that God is with us...God is saving us, He will be with us to wipe our tears, turn our sorrows in to joy, rejoice, as God has found favor with Mary, today God has found favor in us, our redemption is in Jesus.

“Being obedient Mary became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.” It is an invitation for us to attune to the voice of God and listen and obey in order to be partakers in the salvific mission of Jesus.

The history of salvation began with the faith of Abraham and reached its culmination with the faith of Mary and Jesus’ surrender to the will of the Father. We prepare now to celebrate this great Mystery.

“The child to be born is the subject of a twofold angelic proclamation.

- The expectations of Israel will be fulfilled- the promised Messiah and He will be the Davidic Messiah. The angel proclaims this by echoing the prophetic promise of David that was the foundation of that expectation (2 Sam 7:9, 13, 14).
- The child will go far beyond the expectations; for He will be the Unique, Son of God in power through the Holy Spirit.

Let it be to me according to your Word. Mary’s lowly condition before the Almighty God. The fulfillment of God’s promise and the highlighting characteristics of Mary and her faith and the continuity of God’s saving work. The ‘yes’ said by Mary and Jesus to the plan of God ‘undid’ the no said by Adam and Eve. The processes of the Redemption of the world started with Mary’s Words ‘Let it be to me according to your Word’ ...and was fulfilled with the Words of Jesus, “Father if you are willing to take this cup away from me. Let Your will not mine be done.”

The same question is asked of us today:

- Are we ready to give our consent to God that comes to us through different persons and situations of life?
- Do we allow the Word of God take flesh in our hearts, in our lives?

PRAYER

We praise you and thank you Almighty ever living God, for offering us your salvation. By sending your only begotten Son to this world. Thank you, Jesus for your Incarnation.

Oh! Blessed Virgin Mary, You are favored by God, Chosen to be the bearer of the Son of God, Oh Chosen Vessel, You accepted to prepare a dwelling place in your womb for Jesus. Your reception of the will of God brought salvation to the whole world. Help us Mary to believe that nothing is impossible for God.

Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mother of the Church, the first tabernacle, a dwelling made by God, in which Jesus alone entered. Oh Mother of faith, Oh Mother of hope guide us in our uncertainties. Help us when we lose hope, hope in God and in Jesus. By you the knots of Eve are untied, by your faith and surrender salvation has dawn. Through you the great work of the redemption of humankind is accomplished.

You accepted the annunciation of the Birth of the Son of God, a Mystery event. An event ever actual and eternally present. A mystery must be fulfilled in us today and every day of our lives. Help us Oh Mary, like you may we be instrumental in God's mercy and salvation.

Blessed Marie Poussepin, guide us to keep the Presence of God in our lives, by experiencing that God is with us, in us and around us...

May God work in us, in our being. Oh Mary, you became pregnant through the Spirit; we pray that our souls may be pregnant through faith in Jesus Christ, and bring forth the presence of God to others.

CONTEMPLATION

- I will try to learn God's plan in my life.
- I believe in the fulfillment of God's promise in my life.
- I accept the daily events in the light of the Word of God in humility and openness and believe in its power.
- I will not fear because the Lord is with me as my Messiah, my salvation.

ACTION

I pray for the ardent desire to embrace God's will today as Mary did, with faith, love and surrender.