

Meditations: 17

December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we await the Child Jesus' arrival at Christmas.

- The Lord is drawing near
- Jesus becomes part of the human family
- Christ enriches us

THE LORD is near.^[1] The intensity of our longing increases each day, each hour. Our hearts are focused on the arrival of Emmanuel. Today's Gospel presents us with the long chain of generations that have waited for the

Messiah's arrival: from Abraham to David, and right up to Saint Joseph. We were born much later but we are heirs to the same promise. It is not easy to imagine how eagerly so many generations of the Jewish people awaited the promised Messiah. The liturgy offers us a clue when it gives voice to the joyous outburst at the imminent arrival of Jesus: *Rejoice, O heavens, and exult, O earth (Is 49:13).*

Abraham is the beginning of this long chain, the first in a family that will endure forever. He trusted in the Lord and his promise of a multitude of descendants: *Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them (Gen 15:5).* God has used his fidelity and that of so many others to send us his Son and make God's intimacy with mankind possible once again. Our dignity has been restored and raised to unthinkable heights: *no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man*

conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9). Our heart is filled with the deep joy of knowing that we are saved, rescued and healed: “And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory.”^[2] —

Our singing may not always be in tune, but the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us with *sighs too deep for words* (cf. *Rom 8:26*). We would like to respond with the same divine measure. It is impossible to put into words God’s intense desire to come into the world to save us, or his insistence in preparing his people: fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen until the deportation to Babylon, and another fourteen until Christ (cf. *Mt 1:17*). And it is God himself who will rejoice and give thanks in us.

WE ALL have our own family tree. Jesus wanted to have his. And in Mary, his mother, God himself comes to live with mankind, uniting himself to us forever. He comes to bring hope for all men and women of all times and places. With the incarnation, God takes on himself everything human. He unites himself to the story of each person's life in order to offer us eternal life. The Creator of heaven and earth has wanted to belong to the human family.

“In the stable at Bethlehem, heaven and earth meet. Heaven does not belong to the geography of space, but to the geography of the heart. And the heart of God, during the Holy Night, stooped down to the stable: the humility of God is heaven. And if we approach this humility, then we touch heaven. Then the earth too is made new.”^[3] — How often it seems to us that God cannot be where weakness, fragility or mediocrity is

found. If we do not make a pact with sin, but rather strive to embrace the true goods in life, then the humility of God does not reject the stable of our heart, and brings heaven into every moment of our ordinary life, of our home.

For many generations, that long list of Jewish people experienced a yearning that only the arrival of the newborn in Bethlehem would fulfill. Some probably didn't fully understand what they were longing for. Others, in their confusion, turned to idols that were apparently closer and more accessible. This same longing for salvation continues to be present in every person's heart, often without understanding it clearly or being able to put it into words. We are fortunate to grasp clearly the good news of Christmas. We await the arrival of Jesus and are eager for this good news to reach the

neediest heart in the furthest corner of the world.

“WE BLESS YOU, Lord God Most High, who lowered yourself for our sake. You are immense, and you made yourself small; you are rich and you made yourself poor; you are all-powerful and you made yourself vulnerable.”^[4] Sometimes we do just the opposite: we try to see ourselves as great and powerful. As Saint Augustine knew so well: “You, man, wanted to be God and perished. He, God, wanted to be man and saved you. Human pride was so powerful that it needed divine humility to heal it!”^[5]

It is Christ who lifts us on his shoulders up to heaven. Pride brings a brief glory that lasts only a few moments and quickly demands its price. It brings with it anxiousness and unease. Pride constantly needs to seek new ways to stand out above

others. It never brings peace or tranquil fulfilment. Saint Josemaría once admitted: “I know a donkey of such bad character, that if he had been in Bethlehem beside the ox, instead of humbly adoring the Creator, would have eaten the straw in the manger.”^[6] —

God’s love, in contrast, can fill our hearts as nothing else has ever done. When speaking about his love, we will always fall short. What we don’t know about God’s immense Love is much more than what we do grasp. Our Lady who, as the preface of today’s Mass says, “longed for him with love beyond all telling,” will tell us in the intimacy of our prayer these secrets that she knows so well. A mother always knows how to express, with a gesture, with a caress, what can’t be put into words.

^[1] — Liturgy of the Hours, Antiphon to the Invitatory, December 17.

^[2] Preface II of Advent.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 December 2007.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2013.

^[5] Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 183.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 181 (25 March 1931).

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