

Meditations: Friday of the Third Week of Advent

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

- Peace is a gift from God
- The universality of God's salvific plan
- The Baptist draws attention to the true light

THE LORD will come descending with splendor to visit his people with peace, and he will bestow on them eternal life, we pray in today's Entrance Antiphon. Peace is a sign of the coming of the Messiah. The prophets remind us that He will bring peace to Israel, and that only with his help will they be freed from their enemies. Therefore *he is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Is 9:5). Peace is not only the result of human efforts; it is a gift that comes from God's hand, the result of his presence among his people. *A child is born to us, a son is given to us*: his is a peaceful presence that will never fade.

God has made a covenant of peace with mankind. This is what Zechariah recalls on the day of his son John's circumcision. In front of his family and friends, he intones the *Benedictus*, a hymn of praise and

thanksgiving. Rejoicing in the unexpected gift of fatherhood, he exclaims: *The rising sun will visit us from on high, to shine on those who lie in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our steps in the way of peace* (Lk 1:78-79). On Christmas Eve, we will hear the angels sing to the shepherds at Bethlehem with joy: *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to those in whom he delights* (Lk 2:14).

We see clearly that our Lord wants his disciples to enjoy the peace that his presence brings us. *Peace be with you* (Jn 20:19) is the greeting of the Risen Lord. We recover the gift of peace in the intimacy of prayer and in the sacraments. So together with the whole Church, we humbly ask: *Come, Lord, bring to us your peace; let us rejoice before you with a perfect heart.*^[1]

IN TODAY'S first reading, Isaiah announces that salvation is a message for all mankind, including foreigners: those who *keep my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain, I will make them rejoice in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be acceptable on my altar* (Is 56:6-7). No one is excluded from this call. God *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4). Worship is no longer limited to a rite in a certain place after the Incarnation: we can worship in our heart anywhere. “Are you in Jerusalem, are you in Brittany?” Saint Jerome asks. “It does not matter. The heavenly Presence is in front of you, open, because the kingdom of God is within us.”^[2]

Isaiah summons those who are far from God, including those who have never had the opportunity to know the Lord and those who may have

lost their way or become distracted. The Second Vatican Council's Decree *Ad Gentes* reminds us that “the Church, being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14), is more urgently called upon to save and renew every creature, that all things may be restored in Christ and all men may constitute one family in Him and one people of God” (no. 1).

“Being the Church, to be the People of God, in accordance with the Father’s great design of love, means to be the leaven of God in this humanity of ours. It means to proclaim and to bring God’s salvation to this world of ours, so often led astray, in need of answers that give courage, hope and new vigor for the journey. May the Church be a place of God’s mercy and hope, where all feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And to make

others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the Church must be with her doors wide open so that all may enter. And we must go out through these doors and proclaim the Gospel.”^[3] —

AT THE BEGINNING of Advent, the Church exhorted us through the voice of Saint Paul: *It is time to awaken from our slumber. The night is far spent and the day is at hand . . . Let us put on the armor of light* (Rom 13:11-12). During these days, we have heard the strong voice of John the Baptist inviting us to draw closer to Christ. John, as Christ himself said, is *the lamp that burned and shone* (Jn 5:35). The Baptist humbly points to the messenger of universal peace. He does not draw attention to himself, but to the true light who is Christ.

In reading the Gospel of today's Mass, we see how the Baptist knows that everything comes from God, even the breath that gives him life. As soon as Christ begins to be known, John voluntarily hides himself. He tells his disciples to follow Jesus and ends his life in silence, abandoned in prison, happy to have spent himself entirely in God's service. Saint Gregory the Great says that "John persevered in holiness because he remained humble in his heart."^[4] The Baptist himself said: *He must increase, and I must decrease* (Jn 3:30). It would be hard to find a more concise summary of the heart of the interior life.

When we look at the Baptist, we see a man with a strong personality, firm and resolute, not weak or faltering. Nevertheless, in order to fulfill his mission, he does not hesitate to step aside "so that Jesus alone may shine forth."^[5] Saint Josemaría encourages

us to follow the Precursor's example: "Don't forget that it is a sign of divine predilection to go unseen. It gives me great joy to think that one can live one's whole life in this way: being an apostle, hiding oneself and disappearing. Even if it is sometimes difficult, it is very beautiful to disappear."^[6]

This is what we ask God for in today's Mass: *Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings*^[7] Mary, Queen of Peace, will make our desires for peace and humility effective, with the eagerness that Christ alone may reign in souls.

^[1] Alleluia, Friday of the 3rd week of Advent.

^[2] Saint Jerome, *Epistolae*, 2, 58, 2.

^[3] Pope Francis, General audience, 12 June 2013.

^[4] St. Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 20, 5.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letter 28-I-1975*.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Letter 24-III-1930*, no. 21.

^[7] Prayer over the offerings, Friday of the 3rd week of Advent.

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