

Meditations: 20 December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we draw near to the birth of our Lord.

- The joy of every vocation
- Finding favor before God
- Letting God carry out his work in us

THE ARCHANGEL Saint Gabriel has a delicate mission to fulfill. The time has come. God has set his sights on a maiden from Nazareth to carry out the tender history of the salvation of his children. The messenger greets the one who is filled with grace and

all creation holds its breath. *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be (Lk 1:29).*

Many artistic representations have imagined our Mother reading Sacred Scripture when she received the angel's greeting. And it is this meditative attitude that probably allows Mary to keep up a constant dialogue with God, in the permanent "consideration" of things that is the life of prayer.

In contrast to Mary, how often we find it hard to appreciate God's invitations. Sometimes we can even think that God wants to take something away from us, that He is asking us to give up joy here on earth in order to fulfill his will. But the reality couldn't be more different. God is the one who most wants us to be happy, to be filled with joy, to share in his infinite joy. He has embraced the Cross with that sole

objective. And only our freedom can thwart his initiative. “Do not be afraid of Christ!” Benedict XVI said at the beginning of his Petrine ministry. “He takes nothing away, and gives you everything. When we give ourselves to Him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life.”^[1]

In the gospel for today’s Mass, the Church presents us with the vocation of our Mother Mary, whose story is very similar to our own life. Every vocation is a call to joy. Indeed, “the happiness of Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth.”^[2] When God asks us for something, in reality He is offering us a gift. His light illuminates our path, fills our life with meaning and enables us to produce the greatest possible fruit.

DO NOT BE AFRAID Mary, for you have found favor with God (Lk 1:30).

These words of the angel show us how the Creator looks upon his most beautiful creature. Mary is, in some way, God's dream, his consolation, his hope. It is hard for us to realize that God can view us in this way. Of course, we know that God is merciful and that He grants us his grace and restores it as often as necessary. But for Him to "find favor" in us, to cause Him joy as Mary does, can seem something unattainable for us.

However, "the very formulation of the Angel's words helps us understand that divine grace is continuous, not something passing or fleeting; for this reason, it will never fail. Even in the future, the grace of God will always be there to sustain us, especially in moments of trial and darkness. The continuous presence of divine grace encourages us to embrace our vocation with

confidence; our vocation demands a commitment of faithfulness that needs to be renewed each day. Our vocational path is not without its crosses: not only our initial doubts, but also the frequent temptations that crop up along the way. The feeling of inadequacy accompanies Christ's disciple to the end. Yet he or she knows the help of God's grace.

“The Angel’s words descend upon our human fears, dissolving them with the power of the Good News of which we are heralds. Our life is not pure chance or a mere struggle for survival. Rather each of us is a cherished story loved by God. That we have ‘found favor in his eyes’ means that the Creator sees a unique beauty in our being and that he has a magnificent plan for our lives. The awareness of this certainty, of course, does not resolve all our problems nor does it take away life’s uncertainties. But it has the power to transform our

life deeply. The unknown that tomorrow holds for us is not a dark threat we need to overcome, but a favorable time given to us for living out the uniqueness of our personal vocation, and for sharing it with our brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world.”^[3]

SIMPLE SOULS find favor before God, those who let themselves be loved and raised to the heights of holiness. Nothing delights a father as much as seeing his children shine. “Let it be done to me according to your word.” Many years before Mary uttered those words, at the moment of establishing a covenant with the Chosen People, *Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words which the Lord*

has spoken we will do” (Ex 24:3). Mary and the Chosen People use the same verb. The people of Israel, however, place the stress on their own action, on “doing,” while Mary relies on the strength of God acting in her, on “letting it be done.” Although the second might seem easier, we know that often the opposite is the case. We mistakenly prefer to have everything under our own control; what escapes our vigilance and our own plans frequently worries us.

Advent is a time of joy, of rejoicing, of peace. We know that the difficulties will not disappear. But we are saved when we learn to say “yes” to God’s action. “Mary invites us too to say this ‘yes’ which sometimes seems so difficult . . . It might at first seem an unbearable burden, a yoke impossible to bear; but in reality, God’s will is not a burden, God’s will gives us wings to fly high and thus we too can dare, with Mary, to open

the door of our lives to God, the doors of this world, by saying ‘yes’ to his will, aware that this will is the true good and leads us to true happiness.”^[4]

To say “yes” is to ask God that his will be done, to ask for the grace not to be an obstacle to his plans, not to hinder the action of the Holy Spirit. It isn’t easy to open space in our hearts for so much love. The challenge is to realize that “what is most important is not seeking him, but rather allowing him to seek me, find me and caress me with tenderness. The question put to us simply by the Infant’s presence is: do I allow God to love me?”^[5] We can thank Jesus and his blessed Mother for our path of holiness; a life sown with daily happiness, very normal but, at the same time, divine.

^[1] Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 April 2005.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 1005.

^[3] Francis, Message for the XXXIII World Youth Day, 25 March 2018.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Homily, 18 December 2005.

^[5] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2014.

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