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Meditations: Sunday of the Second Week of Advent (Year A)

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer as we begin the second week in Advent.

- Our hope is based on God entering human history
- Looking at our past with hope
- Anchoring ourselves in Christ opens us to the future

“THE ANNUAL celebration of the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem renews in believers’ hearts the certainty that God keeps his promises. Advent is,

therefore, *a powerful proclamation of hope.*”^[1] When considering hope, we can fall into the error of thinking that it is something exclusively directed towards the future. It might seem to us that recourse to this virtue, when confronting adversity of any kind, would mean rejecting the past, closing one’s eyes to the present and dreaming of a better future.

Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that this liturgical time of hope is situated between the memory of Christ’s first coming in Bethlehem and the expectation of his glorious return at the end of time. In other words, Advent reminds us of both the past and the future. “Our hope does not lack a foundation but is supported by an event situated in history, which at the same time exceeds history: the event constituted by Jesus of Nazareth.”^[2]

Saint Luke, in the Gospel of today's Mass, is very precise in recording the historical moment in which Saint John the Baptist, precursor of Christ, began his preaching: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah (*Lk 3:1-2*). A Child, born in a manger, at a specific time, is the one who saves us from evil. God has not remained a distant being, difficult to know, who understands little of our problems and with whom it is impossible to establish a relationship. The Creator has entered human history: this is the root of our hope.

I THANK my God in all remembrance of you – Saint Paul says in the second reading – *that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ* (cf. *Phil 1:3-6*). It may happen that we do not always perceive the “good work” that God has begun in our own lives, either simply because we are distracted, or because of the experience of our own weakness. But this does not stop our Lord from acting in our souls. All the contrary, God has a special love for every “contrite and humbled heart” (cf. *Ps 51:17*). For as Saint Paul also writes, *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more* (*Rom 5:20*). Saint Josemaría viewed the experience of one’s own weaknesses with optimism; he thought that the more evident they are, the deeper the foundations of our spiritual life can be.^[3]

Therefore the virtue of hope is nourished by two attitudes that could seem opposed to each other. On the one hand, it draws strength from gratitude for everything that God has deigned to grant us. *The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad* (Ps 26:3), the psalmist sings, filled with joy. A hope anchored in the great love God has shown us, in the work that he is accomplishing in us, can sustain us in trying moments. But our hope is also strengthened when we look at our own life and accept our failings: “Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow.”^[4] God never asks us for impossible things. He only wants us to let Him enter the deepest corners of our soul, also of our past. Then He will be able to guide our future steps towards the

encounter with Christ who is about to arrive.

ANCIENT ICONOGRAPHY depicted hope as an anchor. Hence, on many ships, the heaviest and most important anchor is named after this theological virtue. Hope in God sustains us in times of storm. But the image of the anchor should not make us think of remaining stationary, as though the solution to our problems consisted in being paralyzed. Christ comes to renew all things (cf. Rev 21:1), so to be anchored in Him means to be willing to set sail for unimagined oceans.

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God (Bar 5:1). Hope combines a realistic acceptance of our own

vulnerability, with openness to the gifts that God gives us each day. Without denying our personality or our past, we want to clothe ourselves little by little in our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom* 13:14). Thus the arrival of Jesus at Christmas will not be merely an external event. Rather we will attain greater intimacy with the God who has wanted to become a Child to fit into our hearts.

Saint Josemaría viewed hope as a “gentle gift from God . . . that fills our souls with joy.”^[5] Anchoring our life in the past of our salvation, and in the future of the second coming of Jesus, endows the present with a divine richness. Every moment of our life is transformed into an encounter with Jesus who came and who will come. Mary, our hope, joyfully opened her own life to God’s future, which is why she was so happy at every moment of her sojourn on earth.

[1] Saint John Paul II, Audience, 17 December 2003.

[2] Benedict XVI, Homily, 1 December 2007.

[3] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 712: “How low you have fallen this time! Begin the foundation from down there...”

[4] Francis, *Patris corde*, no. 4.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 206.