

Meditations: 30 December

Some reflections that can guide our prayer during this Octave of Christmas.

- Anna, the prophetess, announces the Messiah's arrival
- Jesus grew up like any other child
- God's timing

“WHEN a profound silence covered all things, and night was in the middle of its course, your all-

powerful Word, O Lord, bounded from heaven's royal throne" (*Wis 18:14-15*). Thus sings the entrance antiphon for today's Mass. During this Octave of Christmas, we wish to live by this wondrous event: God has sent us his Word, He has become flesh, He is one of us. We would like to thank the Blessed Trinity for all that has happened. We join the voices of the angels who sing without ceasing the glory of God, his happiness, that is, our salvation. Heaven rejoices, and the earth is filled with this joy.

Today, in the Gospel reading, we see Anna, an elderly widow whom Saint Luke describes as a prophetess. It is significant that God chose a humble widow to announce his birth, instead of some well-known or prestigious figure. All the witnesses to Jesus' birth were ordinary people whom society would not easily believe.

Perhaps some people thought that Anna was a bit confused because of the suffering and loneliness of so many years of widowhood, or because of the rigor of her fasting and prayers. We don't know if anyone took her seriously. But God chose to use her to announce the birth of the Messiah: "And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (*Lk 2:38*). Sometimes God chooses witnesses who are seemingly unreliable. Something similar happens with the shepherds, and it will happen again years later with Mary Magdalene, whom the disciples refused to believe. "Only those who have hearts like the little ones – simple people – are capable of receiving this revelation: those with a humble and meek heart, who feel the need to pray, to open their heart to God, because they feel poor."^[1]

AFTER NARRATING the encounter with Anna, today's Gospel continues by telling us how the Holy Family, having fulfilled all the requirements of the Law, set out on the road back to Nazareth. It concludes with a short but profound verse, summarizing in a few words much of Jesus' hidden life: "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (*Lk 2:40*). God respects the natural rhythm of a child's growth; He is not in a hurry; He wants to accomplish the redemption in this natural and unobtrusive way.

St. Josemaría addressed Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico with this petition: bring forth in our hearts "small roses, those of ordinary life, commonplace things, but full of the fragrance of sacrifice and love. I have intentionally said small roses,

because that is what suits me best, since in my life I have only known how to concern myself with normal, commonplace things, and frequently I haven't even known how to finish them. But I have the certainty that it is in those small things, in those everyday concerns, where your Son and you await me.”^[2] —

For thirty years, Jesus' life is once again surrounded by silence, as it was before his birth in Bethlehem. But this silence is very eloquent, since it is there that our redemption is being carried out. Later, many people will say, “Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?” (*Mt 13:55*). The naturalness of ordinary life was also the path that Jesus followed during his thirty years of hidden life. And there we find an example for the sanctification of our

own work and relationships, of what is commonplace and close at hand.

WE HAVE WAITED nine months for our God to be born, and now we will wait thirty years for his public life to begin. Yet we know that the redemption has been underway since the very moment of the Annunciation. Our Mother's "yes" to God's divine designs for the salvation of mankind has set in motion the plan conceived from all eternity in God. It is unstoppable, but it doesn't proceed at the pace we may prefer. It moves seemingly slowly, but never takes a single step backward. "The world is redeemed by God's patience and destroyed by the impatience of men."^[3] Often, routine overcomes us, and we are unable to find God in what is ordinary, in what is repeated day after day.

“When we hear tell of the birth of Christ, let us be silent and let the Child speak. Let us take his words to heart in rapt contemplation of his face. If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. This Child teaches us what is truly essential in our lives. He was born into the poverty of this world; there was no room in the inn for him and his family. He found shelter and support in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals. And yet, from this nothingness, the light of God’s glory shines forth. From now on, the way of authentic liberation and perennial redemption is open to every man and woman who is simple of heart.”^[4] Our salvation has already begun, and God’s faithfulness endures forever.

Anna waited for many years for the Messiah to appear, making space in her heart for God to speak. Perhaps

we sometimes reproach God for his silence, when in reality it is we who are enveloped in noise that prevents us from hearing Him. In the midst of the night and the silence, God has sent his Word, and it is definitive. He will not go back on his covenant. Mary guarded that silence, that normalcy, during nine months and afterward. We ask her to accompany us amid our own silence, because we too don't want to miss the manifestation of her Son.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 2 December 2014.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, Personal prayer before Our Lady of Guadalupe, 20 May 1970.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 April 2005.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2015.

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