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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the second week of Advent. The topics are: our hope is rooted in the fact that God entered history; looking at our past with hope; anchoring ourselves in Jesus opens us to the future.

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- Our hope is rooted in the fact that God entered history

- Looking at our past with hope
 - Anchoring ourselves in Jesus opens us to the future
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“THE ANNUAL evocation 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, which deeply touches our personal and communitarian experience.”^[1] We might mistakenly think hope is solely directed toward the future. In times of adversity, we might fear that relying on the virtue of hope means rejecting the past, closing our eyes to the present, and dreaming of a better future.

However, it is no coincidence that the liturgical season of hope lies between the memory of Christ's first coming in Bethlehem and the

expectation of his glorious return at the end of time. 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] —

In today’s Gospel, Saint Luke records the exact historical moment in which John the Baptist, Christ’s forerunner, began his preaching: *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness (Lk 3:1-2).* The One who saves us from evil is a child born in a manger at a specific moment in time. God did not choose to remain distant, unknowable, and

unconnected to our struggles; the Creator entered our history. This is the root of our hope.

I GIVE thanks to my God, Saint Paul writes in the second reading, convinced that the one who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). At times, we may not perceive the good work God has begun in our lives, perhaps because we are distracted or overly aware of our own weaknesses. Yet this does not stop the Lord from working in our souls. On the contrary, God takes delight in every contrite and humble heart (Ps 51:17) because, as Saint Paul also writes, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more (Rom 5:20). Saint Josemaría viewed personal weaknesses optimistically, believing that the more evident our

weaknesses are, the deeper the foundations of our spiritual life can be.^[3]

For this reason, the virtue of hope is nourished by two attitudes that might seem contradictory. On the one hand, it draws strength from gratitude for all the gifts the Lord has given us. *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy (Ps 126:3)*, we sing with the psalmist, full of gladness. A hope rooted in God's immense love and the work He is accomplishing in us sustains us through difficult times. On the other hand, hope also grows when we look at our life story in its integrity: "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 the impossible of us; He simply desires to enter the deepest

parts of our souls, including our past. Once we allow Him to do so, He can guide our steps into the future, toward meeting Christ who comes.

ANCIENT ICONOGRAPHY represents hope as an anchor. For this reason, on many ships, the heaviest and most important anchor is named after this theological virtue. Hope in God sustains us during life's storms. Yet the image of the anchor should not make us think of a stagnant life, as though the solution to our problems were to remain immobile. Jesus Christ comes to renew all things (cf. *Rev 21:5*), so anchoring ourselves in Him means being ready to set sail toward unimaginable horizons.

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever

(*Bar* 5:1). Hope combines a realistic acceptance of our vulnerability with openness to the gifts God bestows upon us each day. Without denying our personality or our past, we gradually seek to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom* 13:14). Thus, Jesus' coming at Christmas will not be a mere external event but an opportunity for greater intimacy with the God who became a child to dwell within our hearts.

Saint Josemaría described hope as a “that gentle gift from God which makes our hearts overflow with gladness.”^[5] Anchoring our lives in the past of our salvation and the future of Christ's second coming imbues the present with divine sweetness. Every moment of our lives becomes an encounter with Jesus, who has come and will come again. Mary, our hope, opened her own life story to God's future, and

this is why she experienced such profound joy in each moment of her earthly journey.

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

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

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

[4] Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, no. 4.

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

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