

Meditations: 29 December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Christmas season. The topics are: Simeon's vocation to hope; finding Jesus in the Eucharist; a sword will pierce your heart.

- Simeon's vocation to hope
- Finding Jesus in the Eucharist
- A sword will pierce your heart

THE HOLY SPIRIT has revealed to Simeon that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. It is not easy to imagine how this was shown to him. We might say that Simeon has a

vocation to hope, and, in a sense, we too are called to hope. We all hope to see the Messiah's deeds: his healing grace, the joy of redemption coming to earth... In Simeon, we have all received a promise of salvation that is fulfilled where we can see and hear it, here below, on earth. The Messiah is not far away. He has come down and become one of us; we can touch him.

Neither do we know how Simeon discovered the Child. The Gospel does not mention any outward sign. Everything seems to indicate that it was the Spirit himself who prompted Simeon to find him. Mary and Joseph were there with their firstborn child. No one expected God to become a child; it was unthinkable for God to be the son of such an apparently ordinary young woman. Nothing set her apart from the women around them, who had also come with their firstborn children to be purified.

Mary did not need purification, but she was there with the others, fulfilling the Lord's commands out of love and not out of obligation. In the same way, Jesus, her son, did not need to pay for men's sins, but he bore our weaknesses.

The way God shows himself to us each day can be bewildering. We may give in to dispersion and fail to discover him when he passes by. Many mistook him for one of the inhabitants of Nazareth, one of many visitors to the temple. The Messiah's coming and his plan to save all people are discreet, deep, and delicate. God does not impose himself: that is why he wanted to assume our flesh. We can ask God, like Simeon, to open our eyes so that we may contemplate the redemption that is already underway.

NOW, LORD, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation (Lk 2:29-30). Are we attentive in order to discover God's salvation, his hidden and silent action, in all that surrounds us? In the Mass, we participate directly in the salvation Jesus brought about. We touch his grace and receive his merits. We eat his body and drink his blood, "one drop of which can heal the entire world of all its sins."^[1]

Simeon saw the Child only once. That instant was worth a lifetime of waiting. We, on the other hand, may have become accustomed to touching salvation. God has wanted to come so close to us in the Eucharist. It seems too normal to us; every day is too similar to the one before. Sometimes we would like a more spectacular staging. Faced with this temptation, we can imitate the shepherds who stood vigil near Bethlehem. "They

were waiting for God, and were not resigned to his apparent remoteness from their everyday lives. To a watchful heart, the news of great joy can be proclaimed: for you this night the Saviour is born. Only a watchful heart is able to believe the message. Only a watchful heart can instil the courage to set out to find God in the form of a baby in a stable."^[2]

"Going to Communion every day for so many years! Anybody else would be a saint by now, you told me, and I... I'm always the same!"^[3] We are convinced that the divine is overwhelming and exciting, which is why our apparent coldness can cause us pain. But God is counting on this too. Simeon, for instance, prepared himself to receive the Messiah every day; he was increasingly eager to see him and knew that every day could be decisive. The holy Curé of Ars warned us against longing for extraordinary things: "How much

happier we are than the saints of the Old Testament, we who not only possess Him in the immensity of divinity, but who have Him also as He was during the nine months in Mary's womb, and again as he was on the cross. More fortunate than the first Christians, who had to go fifty or sixty miles for the happiness of seeing Him: the church of every parish contains Him; any congregation can, if it so desires, enjoy His most sweet companionship. O happy people!"^[4]—

THE SWORD piercing the Mother of Jesus' heart is the heartbreaking shadow in a scene where everything shines with hope and joy. It is the shade that highlights the reality of the scene. "Mary, instead, with reference to the prophecy of the sword that would pierce her heart,

says nothing. Together with Joseph, she accepts in silence those mysterious words which predict a deeply sorrowful trial and situate the Presentation of Jesus in the temple in its most authentic meaning. Indeed, according to the divine plan the sacrifice offered then *according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons'* (Lk 2:24), prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus.^[5]

Our life is also an image with lights and shadows, an interweaving of hope and discouragement, struggle and defeat. God knows this, and he seems closest to us in this apparent fragility. God resolutely rejects the fiction of a perfect, finished, problem-free world; he can be found in the fragility of the ordinary, in what seems lacklustre. The divine dedication to normality may surprise many souls, but it is the consequence of his commitment to freedom. God

does not raise his voice, and he does not force his way into our lives. The sign we see at Christmas is "the humility of God taken to the extreme (...): God who looks upon us with eyes full of love, who accepts our poverty, God who is in love with our smallness."^[6]

Our Lady, our Mother, also learned to discover God in her newborn son. Her tears, hunger, and tiredness are divine and are, therefore, our redemption. "Beginning with Simeon's prophecy, Mary intensely and mysteriously unites her life with Christ's sorrowful mission: she was to become her Son's faithful coworker for the salvation of the human race."^[7]

^[1] Adoro Te Devote.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 December 2008.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 534.

^[4] St. John Vianney, Sermon on Corpus Christi.

^[5] St. John Paul II, General Audience, 18 December 1996.

^[6] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2014.

^[7] St. John Paul II, General Audience, 18 December 1996.

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