



Instituto Id de Cristo Redentor
Misioneras y Misioneros Identes
Presidencia

Rome, December 11th, 2022.
Third Sunday of Advent.

REFLECTION

Isaiah 35,1-6a.10; James 15:4-9; Mt 11,2-11.

John certainly knew who Jesus was...



The third Sunday of Advent is pervaded by the theme of joy and the whole Gospel is a message of joy: The liturgy proclaims this on the Third Sunday of Advent, which, is traditionally called Gaudete Sunday, that is, the Sunday of “rejoicing” from the words of St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians: *Rejoice in the Lord always; I say again, rejoice.*

The Mass formularies today still retain the call to rejoice, and the source and **cause of that rejoicing is clearly the presence of God in our midst**. He wanted to turn this event into his own name: Emmanuel, God-with-us. What Isaiah had prophesied: *the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel (Is 7:14)* became accomplished fact. But this is only the

beginning... We can illustrate this with a literary story.

Once a shepherd sent his son to a wise man to learn the secret of happiness. When he arrived at the beautiful palace where the wise man lived, the wise man instead of explaining to the boy the secret of happiness, handed him a spoon filled with oil and said: *Take a look around the palace. As you go around, carry this spoon with you without allowing the oil to spill.* The boy began to move around the palace. As he did so he kept his eyes fixed on the spoon. After two hours he returned. ‘Well’, asked the wise man, ‘*what have you seen?*’ The boy was embarrassed and confessed that he had seen nothing since his only concern was not to spill the oil. “*Well then:* said the wise man, ‘*go back and observe the marvels of my palace. You cannot trust a man if you don’t know his house.*’ Relieved, the boy picked up the spoon and returned to his exploration of the palace, this time observing all the beautiful furniture and works of art, enjoying the garden, with its magnificent flowers and fountains. On returning to the wise man he related everything he had seen. ‘*But where are the drops of oil I entrusted to you?*’ asked the wise man. Looking down at the spoon, the boy saw that the oil was gone.

The wise man said, ‘*Well, the secret of happiness lies in the ability to see all the treasures God has given to your eyes and to your heart, and never to forget the drops of oil in the spoon.*’

The poor, the needy, the sick, those who are alone, those who have been betrayed, the orphans... are all the drops of oil in the spoon the Lord has entrusted to you.

This is the first way to understand the joy of one who follows Christ: as a grace, sometimes unexpectedly and always with clarity, **the apostle finds a way to care for those entrusted to him**. Like St. John the

Baptist, behind bars and about to die at the hands of an arrogant and drunken king, he found a way to instruct his bewildered disciples; he sent them to come face to face with Christ.

Even more important than seeing the fruits of his efforts, even if the souls entrusted to him sadly do not want to take advantage of the testimony received, the true apostle has the intimate joy of having collaborated with the divine plan, and in the midst of his tears or his blood, he gives thanks to the Divine Persons for having allowed him to offer his always modest collaboration. St. John the Baptist is a paradigm of this, and... *yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. And whatever humble seed you and I sow, it will grow bigger than our best dreams.

A second manifestation of the apostle's joy is that he/she cannot, **he/she does not feel capable of missing any opportunity to do good**. Again, the best example to understand this is that of the young Mary of Nazareth. Was it not enough to be the Mother of the Savior, did she not therefore deserved to be called "full of grace"? And yet she immediately set out to serve in the household chores to serve her cousin Elizabeth, who was older and needed help in her pregnancy. We may call this "a sacrifice," but above all it reflects how difficult, almost impossible, it is for one who is attentive to God's constant calling, to decline an act of mercy, however limited it may seem.

Revelation says: *God is joy*, but man again inverts the order and says *Joy is God!* In many moments, we become slaves of our Instinct for Happiness (undoubtedly the strongest of all) that seeks to dominate all our experiences, joyful or painful, generous or selfish, and we make happiness into an idol. Man is reduced to looking for ever more intense pleasures and emotions.

Even if it is only "by the elimination method" many of us come to the conclusion that only God can bring us to true joy.

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All of the above may be beautiful, but sometimes we are witnesses or perhaps prisoners of situations like that of Alfredo, a 45-year-old man I met in a home for the elderly, where he went daily to visit his mother. He was accompanied by his slightly younger wife, who suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and whom he pushed in her wheelchair. At one point he lost his relatively comfortable job as an accountant, while his 20-year-old son fell into drug addiction...and it was precisely at that time that his mother passed away, in the midst of pain and respiratory difficulties.

In our meetings, I could not find the right words to tell him. Neither to explain the meaning of pain, nor to remember that God receives our tears, nor to keep in mind that Jesus and Mary also suffered intensely and deeply, nor the assurance that his mother was happy and looked at him gratefully....

I could only resort to what Christ does with us, staying by his side, almost always in silence, speaking only of the happy moments spent with Sofia, his mother, and giving thanks for the gift that his life and his fragile steps were for us. Yes, the deepest happiness goes hand in hand with tears, peace, a grateful memory and the silent company of someone who truly loves us.

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Are you the one who is to come? The above allows us to move on to the second point of this reflection on today's Gospel.

The Baptist's disciples began to doubt that Jesus was the promised Messiah. First, perhaps, as Jesus proclaimed that He is to *set prisoners free*, they may wonder why Jesus has not set John free, as the Prophet Isaiah (61:1) had predicted.

Moreover, Jesus did not fit the Jewish expectations that the Messiah would come as a warrior and a political conqueror, and in fire and brimstones.

On the contrary, the Gospel tells us that He engaged in curing the sick: *the blind could see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life, and the Good News proclaimed to the poor*. Moreover, in the Good News that Jesus proclaimed, He pronounced special

blessings in the Beatitudes on the poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers, and added that those who wish to be his disciples are to love their enemies; not to judge others. All these teachings did not fit the expectations of who the Messiah ought to be.

In spite of the spectacular signs that Jesus gave with the healings and the change of hearts, many could not believe that He was the awaited Messiah. This may surprise us, but we are not very different from those unbelieving Jews.

We too like the disciples of John the Baptist may also begin to doubt that Jesus is our Messiah, especially for those of us who are experiencing different forms of imprisonment, suffering or sorrows in our lives.

The famous detective Sherlock Holmes said that by a drop of water you can deduce the existence of an ocean. Something like this is our testimony to people who suffer, who for some reason cannot be happy. Our humble and modest accompaniment will open their hearts to receive a much greater love, which is that of the Divine Persons.

They will not have to make a logical deduction, but will simply be led to believe that the love and mercy we show them must have a greater source than the always small and perhaps mediocre life of yours and mine. It is like someone who recognizes that the moon reflects the light of the sun. Perhaps this is a simple way to show anyone that Christ really is among us. St. John the Baptist knew that Christ was "the one who had to come" and he did so with such fidelity that people asked him if he was not himself the awaited Messiah.

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The (daily) encounter with Christ demands patient perseverance in two tasks: fasting and prayer. For this reason, in the Second Reading St. James invites us to be patient, like the farmer patiently waiting for the crop. Because God's arrival transforms every inability into ability and every lack into miraculous abundance.

An effective way to live with patience is to look at our past. I have to observe how God has assisted me in unsuspected ways and brought me to the present moment. The conclusion is that he undoubtedly has for me, right now, unsuspected new graces. And it is precisely because I cannot imagine his plans, because I cannot suspect what he will do with my pain, that I sometimes literally lose my patience.

I must prepare my heart to tell him: **If you have placed me in front of this high mountain, it is because you trust me. I will take the first step and surely you will tell me what to do next.** This state of prayer, which I actually receive from the Holy Spirit, is what our Father Founder calls the Beatific Supplication, the supplication of one who asks with the peace and joy of knowing that God will answer. I don't know how or when, but I know that he has answered my trembling voice before.

Without words, Jesus is saying to me: *Look at the times when you were blind and I gave you light, when you were weak and I gave you strength.* It is possible that again and again I am blinded by my passions and weakened by suffering.

May this Third Sunday of Advent help me to believe that it is possible to wait with joy.

May today I decide to look back to better see the presence of the Divine Persons today.

Luis CASASUS
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