

Homily to Community of St. Joseph

December 21, 2009

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My dear brothers and sisters, we are in the Season of Advent which is one of the High Seasons of the Church. The Season of Advent is preparing us for the great Feast of Christmas, Christ shining in our lives. The Church, through the Season of Advent with the Word of God comes to our rescue, trying to install in us this disposition, a disposition to enter into the joy and the peace and the light that God wants to give to each one of us. And so, we hear our mother the Church coming to us with a word from the prophet Baruch in the Second Sunday of Advent where Baruch tells us *“Take off your garment of affliction and sorrow and put on instead, forever, the garment of the glory of your God O Israel.”* He tells us to take off the garment of sorrow and affliction, and instead to put on the garment of the glory of our God forever.

This glory that we are waiting for is Christmas to shine around us. The angel that came to the shepherds told them to go and see this Saviour who was born for them. *“To you today is born a Saviour.”* But the setting where this news was being proclaimed was a setting of darkness. The shepherds were surrounded with darkness. It was in the middle of the night, and with the message of the angels, Luke tells us *“and the glory of the Lord shone around them”*, not upon them, not in them, **but it shone around them**. They were people who were surrounded with darkness and that darkness was going to be dispelled with the glory of the Lord.

The word that came to you and to me today from the prophet Zephaniah and from the Gospel of Luke is interesting. Zephaniah too, invites us to rejoice, to sing a loud, because there is in our midst, the holy one of Israel. But he is not only in our midst, He is inside each one of us because we are God’s temple. Paul tells us that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

What is interesting is this, that when they began to build skylights in houses, the skylight was built square. Then someone came up with the invention that if, instead of building it square, they build it at an angle, then the light that enters through that square would be able to spread better inside the room. There would be a bigger angle of the light being spread. In the book of Kings, when God told Solomon to build the Temple, he was supposed to put in the Temple windows. And God gave him the description of how the windows should be. He said to him that inside the Temple, the window will be square, but outside, the window will be at an angle wider on the outside. It is, so to speak, contrary to the skylights that we build today. With the skylight that we build today, the light comes from the outside to enter the room. The Temple has enough light to throw it outside, to enlighten the world. And this is why, with the light that comes from the windows, the angle of the wall should be outwardly so that the people will be able to benefit more from every little bit of light, from every ray of light that comes from the Temple.

Mary, being the ark, the ark of the covenant, is bringing light to Elizabeth. Sometimes we use the expression “the lights are on, but no-one is home”. Not so with the Word of God. Where there is light, it is a sign of God’s presence. And this is something that we have to be conscious about. Sometimes we say in the Mass, in the Canon, in the Eucharistic Prayer II, “We thank you O God for finding us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you.” This word “presence” ... Mary made herself present to Elizabeth. Mary brought the presence of Jesus Christ to Elizabeth,

and as we have heard many times, and I hope that by now it has been installed in your heart, the Talmud says that there is no such thing as sadness in God's presence. When a person is conscious of God's presence, it is an invitation to enter into joy *"Sing aloud O Jerusalem, for there in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."* The prophet is making the people conscious that God is present among them, and as soon as the people become conscious of God's presence, they will have the same reaction as *Elizabeth "As soon as I heard your greeting, even the child in my womb leapt for joy."* When we hear the Word of God, the Word of God does not make us happy. Yet, everyone wants to be happy.

When we say "Happy Christmas". I do not like it much personally, I like more the idea of a "Joyous Christmas", a "Peaceful Christmas". Why? because happiness depends upon what happens. If what happens to me is according to my plans, then I am going to be happy. But, if what is happening to me is not in conformity to my plans, then that means that that person is going to steal my happiness. Not so with joy. Joy is there to stay. *"These things I have said to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy will be complete."* Jesus Christ tells us, *"Now you have sorrow, you have pain, but you will see me, and you will rejoice, and no-one and nothing will be able to take this joy from you."* The same it is with the Peace. The peace that God gives us is not the peace that the world gives us. *"My peace I give to you"*, Jesus Christ said *"not as the world gives it"* but this is a peace that will stay forever, a peace that has the power to convey to you and to me God's blessing. That is why the Aaronic Blessing *"And the Lord will bless you with peace."* Because peace is the blessing that contains all God's blessings. It is not the absence of war. Neither is it what Albert Einstein has said, where he said that "peace is the balance between the necessities of the body and the higher duties of the soul."

Peace is the ability to receive God with all the graces that He wants to give us. That is the problem that God has with you and with me. He wants to give us these graces, but we don't seem to show interest in receiving them. *"Joy to the World!"* the angels announced, *"and peace on earth"*, which earth? It is your heart and my heart. *"Mary treasured the Word of the Angel in her heart."* And Mary asked *"How can this be since I am a virgin."* It is a different question than Zechariah asked. When the Angel said to him *"Zechariah your prayer has been heard."* Zechariah responded *"Impossible, I am old, my wife is old, and to make it even worse, she is barren."* Zechariah did not hear that beautiful Word. *"Be fruitful and multiply."* We take these words as applying only to marriage – brothers and sisters, we are barren. We don't have the capacity to do good works. *"By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit, and your fruit remains. Without me, you can do nothing."*

"Be fruitful and multiply", in the Book of Genesis is not just a matter of bringing children into the world, it is also a matter of receiving the command of God in our hearts and not stifle it, not suffocate it, but let it grow and bear fruit. *"And the child continued to grow up like Samuel, and he did not leave any of those words fall to the ground."* Mary treasured that Word, and the joy that Mary had in cooperating with the Word of God was a joy that was contagious. *"How is it that the Mother of my Lord comes to me? As soon as I heard the greeting, even the child in my womb leapt for joy."* How is it, she told him, how is it going to happen because I am a virgin. Mary is not questioning the Angel. What Mary is doing is saying "Tell me, what part I have to play so that what you are saying will be fulfilled in my life, so that I will not do some stupid thing that will hinder this Word from becoming flesh. How can it be? I am a virgin. Are you

telling me that I should go and have a relationship with a man?" And the Angel said to her "*The Holy Spirit will overshadow you.*" This overshadowing in the Old Testament is a sign of the presence of God. This overshadowing is used often, like when the disciples were on the mountain at the time of the Transfiguration, a cloud came and overshadowed them. When the disciples were in front of Jesus Christ on the day of the Ascension, this cloud came and overshadowed them. The overshadowing of the cloud is the glory of God ... God is present. These are some of the messages that the Gospel today communicates to you and to me.

It is not enough that we render service, brothers and sisters. It is not enough. Of course to be a disciple means to be able to serve. "*You call me Master and Teacher, and you are right, yet here I am as one who serves. And if I your Master and Teacher have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.*" But Mary went with haste ... she went to serve with haste ... not procrastinating. She served with joy.

You remember that beautiful saying "**The amount of light that our deeds radiate is always proportionate to the amount of joy we invest in doing that deed.**" If what we are doing, we are doing with joy, it radiates light. Mary went with haste ... there is this joy ... when someone tells you "hurry up", you do it to express your love, your joy in serving that person. Not only, but she went also uphill. There is the current against her. So many times we get discouraged, "Oh, I tried to do that in the community, but I was discouraged left, right and centre. Instead of finding cooperation, as soon as I extend my arm, they chop it off." This is going uphill. Mary and Joseph, St. Teresa tells us, are the saints of the impossible. They are the ones who come to our rescue. Mary comes to you and to me and says "**Do whatever he tells you.**" Here also Mary teaches us to serve, and to do the service with joy. She teaches us how to make Jesus Christ present, so that others will be able to experience the same joy that we experience. "**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.**" Mary is so filled with joy that she wants to bring it outwardly. The same it is with you and with me.

Sometimes we think that on Christmas Day we commemorate the birthday of Jesus Christ. On Christmas we celebrate the BIRTH of Jesus Christ in my life. TODAY, this Scripture has been fulfilled in what you have heard. "*Zaccheus, come down, today I must stay at your house.*" And Zaccheus, who heard this invitation, came down quickly and received Him joyfully. When Jesus Christ was in the house of Zaccheus, He told him "*today salvation has come to this house*". When the good thief turned toward Jesus Christ and asked Him "*remember me when you are in your kingdom*" Jesus answered "*today you will be with me in paradise*". Note the importance that Luke gives to that word **today** – it is not tomorrow, but **today**. When Jesus Christ proclaimed the word from Isaiah, He rolled back the scroll and then said to the people "*today this word has been fulfilled in your hearing.*". When you and I open our ears to the Word of God, Christ is born in us. The sperm of the Spirit comes in us ... it is installed in each one of us. The Word of God is called the sperm of the Spirit, and especially today, for these sisters who are going to make their First Promise, to Yolanda and to Pauline, this word comes with a very special invitation in your life, to continue to grow in the spirit of the Teresian Carmel, in the charism of prayer, in the charism of mental prayer, in the charism of contemplation, in the charism of meditation on the Word of God. And then it says as you will be saying when you are making the Promise, that you will continue to grow in the evangelical councils, to grow in chastity, in poverty and in obedience.

Thirty years of the life of Jesus Christ are summed up in that word: *“and he was obedient unto death”*. Today the word *“obedience”* does not mean much – for example with women’s liberation, they want to erase the words *“women be obedient to your husbands”* from the marriage vows. Jesus Christ said *“if you love me, you will obey my commandments”*. Obedience performs miracles. That is why as soon as Mary said *“Let it be done to me according to your word.”* The Word immediately became Flesh in her.

And so, to these two members who today are going to make their promise, I say remember also to live your life according to the Rule of St. Albert, who says explicitly **“this book of the law should not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate upon it day and night, have I not commanded you, be courageous, do not be afraid, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”** It is so beautiful ... It is not only in the Book of the prophet Zechariah that we heard *“Fear not oh Jerusalem”*, the angel said to the shepherds, *“Fear not, I bring you good news.”* Every time you and I hear the word of the God, the Word of God tells us the same thing *“Fear Not, my grace is sufficient for you.”* ... and we say “because I have such a big problem Lord, you know ... I have this problem in the family, I have this problem in the community, I have this problem in my life” and God says *“my grace is sufficient for you”*. This is what God always tells us constantly. *“Three times”* St. Paul tells us *“have I asked the Lord to take away this thorn from my flesh, and three times he told me ‘my grace is sufficient for you’”* St Paul says “ok that is the answer then, every time I am going to pray to this guy, that is what I am going to hear from him “my grace is sufficient for you”. And that IS what God tells us **“my grace is sufficient for you”**.

And, on Christmas, we receive grace upon grace. That is what St. John told us. *“And through him, we have received grace upon grace.”* This is why we strive to live the Beatitudes, so that the Word of God will shine through us, will shine through our actions. The commandment of Jesus Christ is clear brothers and sisters, “Let your light thus shine in front of others, so that seeing your good works they will give praise to your Father who is in heaven. What is this light? It is the glory of God, *“And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.”*

It is not only the shepherds who beheld the Glory of God, but you and I have the same opportunity. As soon as we say like Mary, **‘Yes’** *“Let it be done unto me according to your Word, here I am the handmaid of the Lord”*, as soon as we, like Mary, learn to render service with haste and with joy, as soon as like Mary we strive to render the presence of God in our work, in our home, in our family, with our children, wherever we are, on the sport’s ground, as soon as we strive to do that, we render the Glory of God, dispelling darkness ... *“and the glory of God shone around them”*. The darkness was dispelled, and they said to each other *“Let us go to Bethlehem to see what the Angel of the Lord has announced to us.”* Let us go to Bethlehem. Let us journey towards our poverty, because faith is a journey brothers and sisters.

Sometime we think that the church is magical. The church is in the making, and our faith is in the making. There is this evolution in the teaching of the Church. We saw this. The Church is something dynamic, not something static. Before Vatican II we looked at the Church more like something static, you know - this is the package of doctrines, these are the dogmas. After

Vatican II, the Church is presented to us as DYNAMIC, in motion, things changing, *“and Abraham traveled towards the Negev in stages ”*. Faith is a journey. Mary is the mother of faith, and we see her doing this journey. Abraham, the father of Faith, is making this journey. Moses is making this journey. We are all on a journey, changing constantly, reaching our perfection in Jesus Christ. And so, let us continue to strive asking God to help us to receive this grace, the grace that He wants to give to you and to me, to put on the garment, forever, of the Glory of God. *“You are the light of the world”* Jesus Christ said to His disciples.

You and I have a mission, the mission to be the salt of the earth, the leaven, and to be the salt is to die. If you do not die, you cannot give life. The leaven ... it is interesting the notion of the leaven ... there is so much teaching about the leaven. So much that they say, “if in a big thing, like this church, there is only a grain of leaven on the carpet, the carpet is impure - we think to ourselves, but it is so small, we can just pick it up - but no, the leaven has the power to ferment, to grow, and as soon as you begin to allow it to grow, it will take over the whole church. That is why Jesus Christ said *“be careful of the leaven of the Pharisees, be on your guard.”* Be on our guard from the catechesis of the world. How are we going to dispel it? We do it by opening our ears to the Word of God.

And so, while we keep in our prayers Yolanda and Pauline, we also ask God to continue to help us so that on Christmas Day we too can hear the angels speaking to us individually, and clearly “To you today, is born a Saviour, open your heart for this joy and this peace that God wants to instill in us.”