

Weekdays of Advent: December 17th

Gospel text (Mt 1,1-17): This is the document of the origins of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron of Aram. Aram was the father of Aminadab, Aminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz. His mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed. His mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David, the king.

David was the father of Solomon. His mother had been Uriah's wife. Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Then came the kings: Abijah, Asaph, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah. Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

After the deportation to Babylon Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel and Salathiel of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud of Eliakim, and Eliakim of Azor. Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud. Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar of Matthan, and Matthan of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and from her came Jesus who is called the Christ —the Messiah. There were then fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, and fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the deportation to Babylon to the birth of Christ.

«This is the document of the origins of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham»

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Today, when we read the genealogy of Jesus in the liturgy of the Mass, a sentence commonly said in rural areas here in Catalonia, Spain, comes to mind: « Josephs, Johns and donkeys are to be found in every house». That's why, in order to make a difference between them, one uses the household name. Thus, they say, for example, Joseph from Filomena's, John from Josefina's... In this way, a person is easily identified. The problem is that people become branded by the good or bad name of their ancestors. This is what happens with the «Genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham» (Mt 1:1).

What Matthew is saying is that Jesus is a real man. In other words, that Jesus —just like every man and every woman who comes into this world— does not start from zero, but brings with him a certain historical baggage. This means that the Incarnation is something deliberate, that when God is made man, He is made man with all the consequences. When he comes to this world, the Son of God, brings with him a family past.

Going down through the characters that make up the list we can see that Jesus —as far as family genealogy goes— does not possess “clean report”. As Cardinal Nguyen van Thuan wrote, «in this world, if a people writes its official history, it will speak of its grandeur... It is a unique, admirable and splendid thing to find a people which, in its official history, does not hide the sins of its ancestors». Sins like homicide (David), idolatry (Solomon) or prostitution (Rahab) appear. Along with these, though, there are moments of grace and of faithfulness to God, especially when we talk of Joseph and Mary, from whom «came Jesus who is called the Christ —the Messiah» (Mt 1:16).

To sum up, Jesus' genealogy helps us contemplate the mystery that we are about to celebrate: that God became Man, true Man, and «he had his tent pitched among us» (Jn 1:14).