

Weekdays of Advent: December 17th

Gospel text (Mt 1:1-17): The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the 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, the 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 a “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 “was born Jesus who is called 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 “and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “But it is of no avail to say that our Lord, the Son of the blessed Virgin Mary, was true and perfect man, if He is not believed to be Man of that stock which is attributed to Him in the Gospel.” (St Leo the Great)
- “Joseph is the legal father of Jesus. Through him, Jesus belongs ‘legally’, to the house of David. And yet he comes from elsewhere, ‘from above’ Only God is truly his ‘father’.” (Benedict XVI)
- “God called Joseph to ‘take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’ (Mt 1:20), so that Jesus, ‘who is called Christ’, should be born of Joseph's spouse into the messianic lineage of David (Mt 1:16)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N^o 437)