Weekdays of Advent: December 18th

Gospel text (*Mt* 1:18-24): Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home"

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Today, the Liturgy of the Word invites us to consider the wonderful example of Saint Joseph. He was extraordinarily self-sacrificing and tender with his betrothed, Mary.

There is no doubt that they were both excellent people, in love with each other like no other couple. But, at the same time, we must acknowledge that the Most High intended for their spousal love to endure very challenging circumstances.

Saint John Paul II wrote: "Christianity is the wonder of a God who puts himself on the same level as the creature he has made." In fact, it was He who took the "initiative": to come into this world, He did not wait for us to earn it. Yet, He proposes His initiative, He does not impose it: He almost—we might say—asks our "permission." The vocation of Mother of God was proposed to Mary—not imposed upon her! "He who could create all things from nothing would not remake his ruined creation without Mary" (Saint Anselm).

But God doesn't just ask for permission; He also asks for our cooperation with His plans, and for heroic

cooperation at that. And so it was in the case of Mary and Joseph. Specifically, the Child Jesus needed parents. Even more than that: He needed the heroism of His parents, who had to make a great effort to defend the life of the "little Redeemer."

What is truly beautiful is that Mary revealed very few details of her birth: such an emblematic event is recounted in just two verses (cf. Lk 2:6-7). In contrast, she was more explicit when speaking of the tenderness her husband Joseph showed her. The fact was that "before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18), and to avoid the risk of disgracing her, Joseph would have preferred to disappear discreetly and renounce his love (an unfavorable social circumstance for her). Thus, before the law of charity had been proclaimed, Saint Joseph already practiced it: Mary (and the fair treatment of her) was his law.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer. The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent” (Saint Bernard)

- “Let us allow ourselves to be ‘filled’ with St Joseph's silence! We are in such deep need of it! During this season of preparation for Christmas, let us cultivate inner recollection” (Benedict XVI)

- “The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility. ‘That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’, said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée (Mt 1:20). The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son’ (Is 7:14)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 497)