Weekdays of Advent: December 23th

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:57-66): When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, “No. He will be called John.” But they answered her, “There is no one among your relatives who has this name.” So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be?” For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

“‘What, then, will this child be?’ For surely the hand of the Lord was with him”

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(Girona, Spain)

Today, in the first reading, we read: “‘Now I am sending my messenger—he will prepare the way before me…’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:1). The prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled in John the Baptist. He is one of the main characters of the Advent liturgy, who invites us to prepare ourselves with prayer and penance for the coming of the Lord. As the collect prayer of today’s Mass says: “As we see how the Nativity of your Son according to the flesh draws near, we pray that to us, your unworthy servants, mercy may flow from your Word, who chose to become flesh of the Virgin Mary and establish among us his dwelling.”

The birth of the Precursor speaks to us of the proximity of Christmas. The Lord is near! Let us prepare! When the priests from Jerusalem asked him who he was, he replied: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord” (Jn 1:23).

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20), we read in the communion antiphon. We must examine how we are preparing to receive Jesus on Christmas Day: God wants to be born primarily in our hearts.

The life of the Precursor teaches us the virtues we need to receive Jesus profitably; fundamentally,

humility of heart. He recognizes himself as an instrument of God to fulfill his vocation, his mission. As St. Ambrose says: "Do not boast of being called a son of God - let us recognize grace without forgetting our nature -; do not be proud if you have served well, because you have fulfilled what you had to do. The sun does its work, the moon obeys; the angels fulfill their mission. The instrument chosen by the Lord for the Gentiles says: ‘For I am…not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God’ (1 Cor 15:9).”

Let us seek only the glory of God. The virtue of humility will enable us to prepare ourselves properly for the feasts that are approaching.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Elizabeth is aware of Mary’s presence, but John is aware of the Lord’s: a woman aware of a woman’s presence, the forerunner aware of the pledge of our salvation. The women speak of the grace they have received while the children are active in secret, unfolding the mystery of love with the help of their mothers.” (Saint Ambrose)

- “John announces a greater one who comes after him. His own role is to prepare a path for this mysterious Other, his whole mission is directed toward him. Great things are about to unfold.” (Benedict XVI)

- “John the Baptist is ‘more than a prophet’ (Lk 7:26). In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets. John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah. He proclaims the imminence of the consolation of Israel; he is the ‘voice’ of the Consoler who is coming (Jn 1:23). As the Spirit of truth will also do, John ‘came to bear witness to the light’ (Jn 1:7). In John's sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfills the longing of the angels.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 719)