Weekdays of Advent: December 24th

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:67-79): Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

"The dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness"

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Today, the Gospel recounts Zechariah's song of praise after the birth of his son. In the first part, John's father gives thanks to God, and in the second, his eyes look toward the future. He exudes joy and hope as he recognizes God's saving action with Israel, which culminates in the coming of God himself incarnate, prepared by the son of Zechariah.

We already know that Zechariah had been punished by God because of his unbelief. But now, when the divine action is fully manifest in his own flesh—for he regains his speech—he exclaims what until then he could only say in his heart; and how true his words: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel…" (Lk 1:68). How often we see things in a dark, negative, pessimistic light! If we had the supernatural vision of events that Zechariah displays in the Benedictus, we would live with joy and hope in a stable way.

"The Lord is near; the Lord is here." The father of the precursor is aware that the coming of the Messiah is, above all, light. A light that illuminates those who live in darkness, under the shadow of death—that is, us! May we fully realize that the Child Jesus comes to illuminate our lives, to guide us, to show us the way we must walk! May we allow ourselves to be guided by his dreams, by the hopes he places in us!

Jesus is the “Lord” (cf. Lk 1:68, 76), but he is also the “Savior” (cf. Lk 1:69). These two confessions (attributions) that Zechariah makes to God, so close to Christmas Eve, have always surprised me, because they are precisely the same ones that the Angel of the Lord will assign to Jesus in his announcement to the shepherds, which we will be able to hear with emotion this very night at Midnight Mass. For it is God who is born!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “We are Your image, and You have become ours, by this union which You have accomplished with man. By this ineffable love of Yours, therefore, I constrain You, and implore You that You do mercy to Your creatures." (Saint Catherine of Siena)

- “Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man.” (Francis)

- “St. John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way (Mt 3:3. He inaugurates the Gospel.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 523)