December 27th: Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist

Gospel text (*Jn* 20:2-8): On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

«He saw and believed»

Fr. Manel VALLS i Serra
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the liturgy celebrates the festivity of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist. The first day after Christmas, the Church celebrates Saint Stephen's day, the first martyr of the Christian faith. And the following day is the feast of Saint John. Saint John is the one who better and most deeply understood the mystery of the Word Incarnate. John was the very first “theologian” and best example for any other true theologian. Today's proposed fragment of his Gospel helps us to consider Christmas from the perspective of the Lord's Resurrection. Indeed, when John arrived at the empty tomb, “he saw and believed” (Jn 20:8). Trusting the Apostles’ testimony, every Christmas we are stimulated to ‘see’ and ‘believe’, too.

We can also find these same words “see” and “believe” in connection with Jesus' birth, the Verb incarnated. Pushed by his heart's intuition —and we should add, by “grace”— John “sees” beyond what, at that time, his eyes can see. In fact, he believes without “having yet seen” the Christ; and receives the praise of those “who have not seen and have believed.” (Jn 20:29), and that ends chapter twenty of his Gospel.

Peter and John “run” together towards the tomb, but the text says John “ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first” (Jn 20:4). It seems that the desire to be again by the side of the One he loved —Christ— was stronger than that of physically being next to Peter, with whom, however —by waiting for him and allowing him to be the first to enter the tomb— he shows that it is Peter who holds the primacy of the

Apostolic College. Yet, it is his ardent heart, full of zeal, John's impassionate love, which impels him to “run” and “outrun”. This is a clear invitation for us to equally live our faith with such a fervent desire to see the Resurrection.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “John, next to the manger tells us: look at what is granted to those who give themselves to God with a pure heart. They will participate in the total and inexhaustible fullness of the human-divine life of Christ as a real reward.” (Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

- “What better comment could there be on the ‘new commandment’ spelled out by John? Let us pray to the Father to be able, even if always imperfectly, to live it so intensely that we share it with those we meet on our way." (Benedict XVI)

- “Taking up St. John's expression (‘The Word became flesh’: Jn 1:14), the Church calls "Incarnation" the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it (...).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 461)