

Christmas II

Isaiah 61: 1-3 & Matthew 2: 19-23

Our life, our Christian life is a life in a constant tension. On one hand, being a Christian requires a lot of sacrifices, a lot of denial of oneself. But on the other hand, it's also a life of achievements, a life of fulfilment of the plan of God. And it's rewarding in that respect.

Today's gospel (Matthew 2: 19-23) is the continuation of the gospel of the feast of the Holy Innocents celebrated last week. It describes the travels of the Holy Family. We could clearly see how Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus must flee to Egypt to avoid the wrath of Herod.

One might ask, why all this? Why is it that the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and their newborn baby must suffer this hatred and become refugee in a foreign land?

I think it is because of the assignment, the work that the baby received from God the Father. And here is that work:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, ³ To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

That is the work that the Father has set for the baby to “walk in”.

If we take out the middle part of this passage, this is what we have: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me...that He may be glorified”.

How does that work? How can God the Father be glorified just by His Spirit upon the Son?

1 Through the obedience of the Son

Jesus demonstrated obedience to the Father by doing what he was called to do: “to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit”.

That's what he had been sent to do and that's what he did. And the Father was pleased and therefore glorified in the obedience of His Son.

2 Through the choices that the Son made

One of these choices is between truth and lies. In him there was no confusion: you will NOT see truth and lies co-existing together.

Jesus knew that; He knew that it's impossible and even ridiculous to tell the truth and lies at the same time. He made the right choice, choice to say "yes" or to say "no", but never "yes" and "no" at the same time.

3 The Son serves the Father for the right reason

He totally surrenders to the will of the Father even to death. We remember the episode of the garden of Getsemani when the Son had to surrender to the "will" of the Father. The Son has no other agenda than to serve the Father. He doesn't go ahead of the Father; He doesn't pursue his own interest first; He humbles Himself, He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men."⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2).

What is the lesson we learn from this unplanned round trip to Egypt?

Lesson

We must be aware of opposition and hatred we will face while doing our best to serve God. When we describe our lives as being "in Christ" we mean that our lives share the themes of his life, and we share his destiny. One of those themes is suffering, hatred, and violence. As we declare this year a year of outreach and evangelism, we need to be aware of that reality. If God is with us, if Christ lives within us, if we try to follow Christ and do God's will, then we must expect experiences of opposition; we must expect to spend time in the wilderness and we will be assigned our cross. We will fall from time to time. Our weakness will occasionally cause us to sin. But God will remain in control. He will use our trials and failures to humble us and form new virtues in us. His presence with us will cause us to grow in faith and perseverance. When we look back, we will see that the very worst things we faced were used by God to make us what he wants us to be and accomplish his will in the lives of others as well.

When we look at life this way, we begin to look at our enemies differently. Our "enemies" are those who apparently have power to disrupt our lives and make them painful and difficult. We can, by prayer and discernment, come to understand how God is working in and through those "enemies" to accomplish his will in us and in them.

Sometimes it looks like evil is in control in the world and in our lives. But the big issue is trust. Can we really trust that God is in control in the midst of all we are going through and all we see happening in the world?

The really good news that we see in the story about the Holy Family making a round trip to Egypt is that God is in control, whether we believe it or not. God is in control of our families, our relationships, and our church.

Remember this very thing: whatever Jesus did and said, He did and said to the glory of the Father, no matter the cost! Go and do likewise!

O ALMIGHTY God, who art a strong tower of defence unto thy servants against the face of their enemies; We yield thee praise and thanksgiving for our deliverance from those great and apparent dangers wherewith we were compassed. We acknowledge it thy goodness that we were not delivered over as a prey unto them; beseeching thee still to continue such thy mercies towards us, that all the world may know that thou art our Saviour and mighty Deliverer; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.