

4th Sunday of Advent (A)  
(Isaiah 7:10-14 / Matthew 1:18-24)  
22.12.2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

Each verse of the Old Testament speaks of Jesus. That is a paradoxical statement which perhaps surprises some of us, but this is the teaching and the faith of the tradition of the Church. Each verse of the Old Testament finds its full meaning in the New Testament, in the person of Jesus. The New Testament, which is about the life and message of Jesus, is the blossoming of the Old Testament.

We have a clear illustration of this statement in the choice of Scripture readings for our weekly Sunday Eucharist. The first reading of the Old Testament is always chosen because of its connection with the gospel passage of the day. It is a key which is proposed to help open up for us the gospel passage set before us, in a bid to guide our understanding of the text. The gospel passage is shown to be the fulfilment of what was suggested by the Old Testament reading of the day.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent (year A), this statement is beautifully underlined by the fact that one long verse taken from the first reading – a text by the Prophet Isaiah – is quoted verbatim in the gospel passage. The mysterious prophecy of Isaiah: “The maiden will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means ‘God is with-us’” is used by St Matthew in the narrative of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus to Joseph to express the mystery of Mary’s pregnancy: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.”

The child Jesus who was born more than two thousand years ago in Bethlehem and whose birth we remember each year at Christmas is God made man. The two readings we have just heard this morning tell us that his name is Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us. Let us meditate today upon the name of the child: God-is-with-us.

The God revealed in Jesus is not a distant deity. He is not a remote God who orders everything from afar. Our God is not seated in front of a huge computer screen in Heaven, sending out a blessing in the direction of this one and a fatal sickness in that of another. He is not the Supreme Organizer who orders natural disasters and epidemics, persecutions, wars or violence, to occur when and where he wants. Put simply, our God is not in charge of and responsible for the good and the bad things that happen to us.

If this is so, we can legitimately ask: Who is God then? What does He do? The God revealed in Jesus is not a God over or against us, a God that we should fear. He is not a distant God. The God revealed in Jesus is God-with-us, God within us, God within our heart. There, in our heart, the Spirit of Jesus does not cease to pray to the Father, saying ‘Abba-Father’, following the rhythm of each breath we breathe. The Spirit of Jesus, present and active within us, reminds us that we are children of God. We are brothers and sisters of all those who are children of God. We

should behave with one another as brothers and sisters should, that is to say with love, respect and compassion.

Not only the Holy Spirit lives within us, but also the Father and the Son. We read in St John's gospel (14:23): "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him". So we can say that the three persons of the Blessed Trinity dwell within us. The good news of 'God-is with-us' is that each one of us is a temple of the Blessed Trinity. Once again, our God is not one who is distant, far from us; He is within us. We are called to become more and more aware of this truth of our Christian faith.

The God revealed in Jesus, God-with-us, is also present in those who cross our path and were created in the image and likeness of God. If we look at them with trust, love and respect, we can discern in them something of the revelation of God's mystery to us. We are icons of Christ for one another. We reveal the Lord to each other.

The God revealed in Jesus, God-with-us, is in our midst, in the words we exchange with one another. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Let us not underestimate the value of verbal communication. Through the words we speak the Lord reveals himself and makes known his will to us. Through our communication with each others, the Lord is really there between us.

God is with us in our joys and in our trials. His mission is not to take away or dissolve our difficulties like a sugar daddy might do, but to bear the crosses of our lives with us. It is easier for us to bear a cross when we are helped by someone than it is for us to bear a cross alone.

When everything goes wrong, we are tempted to say: Where is God? What is he doing? He is right beside us, compassionate, walking the path of life with us. When the path is tough, he murmurs into our hearts that he is victorious over sin and death; He reminds us that he promised to give a share in his victory. He murmurs into our hearts that there is an exit to the tunnel in which we find ourselves, that light and life will eventually be seen again. He invites us to hope again and again. "Hope is not deceptive because the Love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rm 5:5).

Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us is also a transcendent God, a God beyond all telling. But perhaps his transcendence is precisely in his proximity, a proximity that we cannot experience with any human being. To quote St Augustine: "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself".

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to welcome the good news of God-with-us in our lives today.