

2nd Sunday after Christmas
(Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2. 8-12 / John 1:1-18)
02.01.2022
Amazement

Addressing young people during his trip to Greece, Pope Francis declared: “Wonder, amazement, is the beginning not only of philosophy, but also of our faith.” (06.12.21)

For all of us, the great threat to our faith at Christmas resides precisely in the fact that we are no longer amazed and surprised by the event we celebrate.

That God embraced humanity as he did in Jesus was unheard of, and remains unequalled in history. In a way, it was and it should be both heart and mind blowing. The birth of Jesus is amazing because it challenges all that we spontaneously think about God: it shows us that the Lord is not far away in the skies but he is, as St Augustine says, “closer to us than we are to ourselves”; the Lord God does not reveal himself to us as an imposing king or an intimidating warrior but as a humble and frail child. He is not hidden somewhere in heaven waiting for us to accomplish marvellous deeds or make great sacrifices in order to appear on the scene. The Lord God is not against us or indifferent to us. He is with and for us. We are not alone. We were not thrown upon the face of the earth at the whim of a divinity who does not care about us.

While we are tempted to see God as a neutral and impartial judge, Christmas reveals to us that he chose to be on our side in the fight against sin, with us in our struggles with temptation.

This is what Christmas is all about, and it is truly amazing!

Yet our amazement should not stop there. The Incarnation is not an event in the past. It is today, here and now, that God takes flesh in each one of us. Pope Francis reminds us that “we cannot help but be amazed that for God we are, and always will be, his beloved children. (...) In God’s eyes we are a wonder.” (06.12.21)

As we praise the Lord because we are “wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14), we should praise the Lord for one another, discern and respect more fully the wonder that lies in one another.

Our amazement should have moral consequences, it should make us more committed in our desire to see our society and our Christian communities purified from all acts or words of discrimination, freed from all bullying, indifference, all verbal or physical abuse, from all structures which do not respect children, women or men.

Once again let it be said that there is still a lot for us to marvel at. In the 4th century, St Basil told the people of Caesarea: “the grandeur and beauty of creatures may give you a just idea of the Creator. (...) Thus earth, air, sky, water, day, night, all visible things, remind us of who is our Benefactor.” (*Hexaemeron*, Hom. III, 10)

In its beauty and its mystery, the whole of creation is – should be – a source of amazement because it speaks of God, its creator. Thus the ecological concern is not a trivial past time for some people who have nothing else to do, it is an imperative for all Christians who want to be faithful to their faith. According to Patriarch Bartholomew “to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins” (08.11.1997 quoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato n.* 8)

The sinful path of use and abuse of people and of creation begins with the loss of a sense of awe and amazement, it begins when we become unaware that when we meet a sister or a brother, when we look at nature, there is more than what meets the eye. We are called to discern in everyone and everything more than what we see. In all there is something great which comes from God.

Obviously our amazement does not make us blind to what is amiss or broken in our lives and in creation. We know, for example, that the Covid pandemic is dragging on, threatening our health and our relationships.

Yet we believe that to cultivate a spirit of amazement is the best way for us to avoid becoming short-sighted and blind to the wonders of grace, blind to God's word active and alive in the world today.

At Christmas, God reveals that it is in our wounded and messy world, in our weak and fragile lives that he wants to dwell and accomplish great and beautiful things. And this is what he does today.

When our faith grows dull, when we are no longer ready to be surprised by love, when we take life and all its mystery for granted, then faith becomes insipid and meaningless.

Abraham Heschel believed that "life without wonder is not worth living." (*Man is not alone*, p. 37) Allow me to reformulate his statement as follows: "Faith without wonder is not worth practising."

The year 2022 will certainly be marked by pains and joys, by times of darkness and times of light. It will certainly not be all wonderful... and this is life!

That is why we must train our eyes to discern God's presence by our side and be amazed that, despite all appearances, where the Lord is, love is present. In difficult, sad or dramatic circumstances, the flame of love may be very small and even hidden in the embers. The amazing good news is that God's love, as insignificant and fragile as it may appear, is stronger than death, it is able to warm our hearts and to be the driving force which allows us to move forward in life.

In our families and communities, may we be and may we help one another to be on the lookout for all the signs of God's love. Like the disciples may we be amazed at the greatness of God and marvel at all that Jesus is able to do within us and around us (cf. Lk 9:43)