

4th Sunday of Advent (A)  
(Isaiah 7:10-14 / Matthew 1:18-24)  
18.12.2022

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's gospel passage is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy heard in the first reading. That is obvious because, as you have noticed, the evangelist quotes verbatim the prophet: "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 fact that the Evangelist uses Isaiah's messianic prophecy to describe the birth of Jesus wants to show us that Jesus is the Messiah foretold and awaited by Israel. Jesus, who is the Son of God, is also the Messiah who comes to set humankind free from sin and death. By his coming into the world, especially by his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus forgives our sins and delivers us from the fear of death. With Christ's resurrection death is no longer a meaningless and painful end, but a new birth, a passage toward fullness of life.

Joseph is asked by the angel to give to the child of Mary the name Jesus, a name which means 'God saves', "because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins". The messianic child foretold by the prophet Isaiah was called Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us. So, Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us. What a glorious name! Just before his Ascension, the Risen Lord had promised us to be with us always. We believe that the Risen Lord and his Father are faithful to their promises. The Good News is that the Lord is always with us. As a consequence, we should always be with him. But we know by experience that most of the time we prefer to be with ourselves or with our petty idols than to be with Jesus. Even though this be the case, the truth is that Jesus is always with us.

Jesus is with us when everything is fine, when everything is going smoothly. In these situations, we should be grateful, our hearts should be filled with gratitude. But, instead of being grateful, have we not a propensity to take everything for granted? The forthcoming celebration of Christmas is perhaps an invitation for us to develop a spirit of gratitude and to foster that attitude in our hearts and minds, giving thanks to the Lord for his being with us always, for his being a continual source of blessing for us by his presence in our lives, forever at work within us, always by our side.

Jesus is also with us when the path of life is tough, when the Lord seems to be absent, when he appears to have abandoned us in the midst of our trials and misery. The truth is that, despite appearances, even if we don't feel his presence, the Lord is always with us, even in the midst of our darkness and our depression; even when we feel lonely and when everything and everybody seems to be against us. At these times, we are invited to believe in the Lord's hidden presence. We are invited to search for God, to seek his face, to be on the look out for his humble and discreet presence. The Lord is there beside us, suffering with us when we suffer, for He is compassionate. He is present by our side, ready to help us, wanting to answer us when we call out to him. He awaits our call because he respects our liberty. He does not impose himself upon us. Christmas invites us to seek the presence of the one who has promised to be with us always

and who is faithful to his promises. If we seek the Lord, if we ask for his help, he will manifest himself to us. He is the one who has come to save us, the one who wants to save us. To be with Jesus is to seek his face again and again in all the circumstances of our lives. It is to find Him and, as we find Him, to continue to seek him. Lord, you are with us, you seek our face, our attention, our heart; we are with you, we seek your face.

During the Advent season we are presented with some great biblical figures to help us to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ into the world and into our lives: John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary are some of these figures, Today it is Joseph who is proposed to us as “a just man”, as a model of faith and fatherhood, a model of gentleness and compassion.

We are shown how Joseph listens to God with a humble, obedient and courageous heart. The gospel tells us that Joseph was betrothed to Mary but before they came together, Mary was found to be with child. Joseph was thinking of divorcing Mary secretly when, in a dream, he received a message from an angel of the Lord, (that is to say from the Lord himself), who told him not to be afraid to take Mary into his home as his wife, for the child within her had been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit... I don't know what your reaction is when you listen to such a story; I guess that for any of us this would be a lot to take in, but Joseph, because of the strength of his faith, believed what the angel told him and did what was asked of him. Joseph displayed an immense trust in God; he put the needs of his wife and his family first, before his own needs; he allowed God's plan to unfold through their lives for the salvation of the world.

As we walk toward Christmas, at the school of St Joseph, we are called to do the same. We are called to listen attentively to God's word. The Lord speaks to us not only in dreams, but also through the Scriptures, through our brothers and sisters in humanity who were created in the image and resemblance of God, through the Church, through the Church's Tradition with a capital T and its teaching, through all the circumstances and experiences of our lives, and through the whole creation which reflects its Creator.

Like St Joseph we are called to listen to the Lord, to welcome his will, and give flesh to it by our lives, even if this entails changes to our own legitimate plans and expectations. In so doing, we allow Jesus to come into our lives as Emmanuel, God-with-us, the God who saves. In so doing, we reveal by our lives to our brothers and sisters in humanity that Jesus, God-with-us, is walking the path of life within them, walking the path of life by their side.