

4th Sunday of Advent (C)
(Micah 5:1-4 / Luke 1:39-44)
22.12.2024
To be a blessing

The episode of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is a very simple and yet truly amazing moment of joy and grace. Elizabeth is blessed by the coming of the Child Jesus and Mary is blessed by Elizabeth: “Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

The meeting between the two women anticipates a reality which will be fully revealed at Christmas in the birth of Jesus: with God dwelling within us, we are enabled to become a blessing for one another. In faith, trusting in God’s words, we can bring Christ to all those we meet and so be a blessing for them. By the Holy Spirit given to us at our baptism, we are sacraments of Christ for one another.

This empowerment is a generous gift from God and it is also a great responsibility.

Like Mary, we may be puzzled by God’s gift and intervention in our lives. Whether or not we feel worthy, whether or not we think that we are ready to take responsibility for the gift given to us is not what matters most. What really matters is our openness to God’s grace. Like Mary at the Annunciation, what is necessary is our *fiat*, our “yes” to God’s coming in our lives. We might ask ourselves: where we are and as we are, do we allow God to use us as channels of the blessings he wants to bestow on all?

The Greek word used by St Luke, translated here by “blessed” is the same word found in the Beatitudes (Lk 6:20-22). It is used to describe the blessedness of those who live in accordance with God’s will. So blessedness is not out of reach for each one of us, it is not something that we will experience only at the end, after our physical death, or something reserved for exceptional and outstanding people...

When we strive to listen to the Spirit and to live according to his promptings, then what we enjoy is a foretaste of the blessedness which we will enjoy fully in heaven. We can know here and now the abiding joy and the contentment that come from a right relationship with God and with all others.

It is one thing to be blessed but it is another thing to receive the blessing, and to live it. Here Mary is the striking example of someone who was blessed and who embraced God’s blessing. Immediately after she was blessed by Elizabeth, she declared: “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.” (Lk 1:47-48) Since we are all, more or less, tempted to doubt about our own blessedness and to send ourselves on any guilt-trip over our limitations and mistakes, it is encouraging to see Mary so trusting in regard to God’s gift to her.

Moreover, there was no self-centredness in Mary, she knew that she had to become a source of blessing for others. For our part, do we bless others with the gifts of patience, kindness and love? And when they come our way, do we welcome these blessings from others?

Does it not happen sometimes that we nurse grudges, or cling to wounds without letting go of the pain? Do we not opt sometimes for bitterness and revenge rather than engaging ourselves on the path of freedom and peace of heart?

The sad reality is that we can refuse a blessing or prevent it from accomplishing its work in our lives. We may be so busy, fearful, proud or lazy that we can make ourselves unavailable when a blessing comes our way. The challenge is that most of the time blessings come to us in unexpected ways, they rarely come how and when we think they should.

Honestly, who would have imagined, or foreseen, that the Messiah in whom we receive “every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3), would come to us vulnerable and poor as a child in a manger, in such an unassuming and discreet manner?

Maybe more challengingly, the fact is that the blessings we receive never leave us unchanged. Each time we receive a blessing, there is a *before* and an *after*, we are no longer the same. It is not first a question of *feeling* different but of *knowing* that, in faith, the Lord has equipped us for the journey that lies ahead.

The coming of the Lord in Mary’s womb and in Elizabeth’s home was a life-changing event and a blessing for these 2 women and for the whole world.

As we prepare to welcome the Lord, we are reminded that the Lord comes to bless us, and through us, to bless all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

While it is good to rejoice and to have fun together at Christmas, the coming days cannot be reduced to that. Like the shepherds, at Christmas, we are called to become messengers of the blessings of peace (cf. Lk 2:14) for the whole world. In our families and communities, in the political and financial decisions we make, once again like the shepherds, we must not forget that we have been commissioned to make known all the blessings we have received from this Child and to glorify and praise God by our words and deeds (cf. Lk 2:14-17).