

Sunday, December 28, 2014 Feast of the Holy Family (B)

Conventual Mass My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

After the warmth and joy of our celebration of the nativity of our Lord, today the church introduces another theme which will become dominant in the future proclamation of the gospel. It is especially relevant in the feast of the Holy Family which is presented to us as a model for us to follow. When the Word became flesh, he entered fully into our human condition with all its difficulties and messiness. We are brothers and sisters to the Word incarnate. And so he and his family shared in our sufferings as well as our joys.

Even as we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family, our liturgy centers on the person of Jesus and his mission.¹ “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” The first reading from

¹ Days of the Lord; The Liturgical Year, Volume 1 (Collegeville, Minn., The Liturgical Press, 1991) 231.

Genesis reminds us that with Abraham and Isaac –the son of the promise- the long line of heirs to the covenant begins.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this line, this promise. It culminates in his person.²

The author of Hebrews in our second reading underlines the faith of Abraham in God’s plan and promise of fulfillment. This faith was shared by Mary and Joseph and is meant to be imitated by the followers of Christ. It is an absolute trust in a loving God, come what may as exemplified by Jesus’ relationship to his Father even when it led to the cross. The image of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane illustrates that faith and trust more than words can tell. From first to last, the life of Jesus was obedience to the Father.

Following the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem where his manifestation as the Christ began. The prophet Malachi foretold: “Behold, I

² Days of the Lord, 232

send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 1:1). Christ did not come in the manner of princes or men of earthly power. The Messiah came as an infant carried in the arms of his mother. In some sense, he was enthroned by his parents at the presentation. There, he was recognized as “The Anointed of the Lord” by two elderly people symbol of all those who lived in hope of “the consolation of Israel.”³ The ordinary person saw only a poor couple with their infant son and the turtledoves, the sacrifice of the poor.

Simeon’s canticle proclaimed that the mystery of salvation was already accomplished in this child. “Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, you have fulfilled your word.” Up to then God was preparing his salvation. In this “now” all of salvation history is called to

³ Days of the Lord 233

mind. “Now” salvation is given, and even the gentiles will share in it. Jesus, “light of the nations” has come to bring all peoples his salvation, a mission later taken over by the apostles.⁴

Until now, that is in the annunciation, the visitation, and the Annunciation to the shepherds, Jesus had only been hailed as the Messiah for Israel. Now he is also recognized as the salvation of the pagans. Luke, in his gospel and in Acts, insists on this. In Simeon’s canticle Luke shows that the salvation of the pagans was acknowledged at Jesus’ infancy by a man who was a model witness of Israel waiting for the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies.⁵

Simeon turned to Jesus’ parents to bless them and to give thanks to God for what God had done and will do through them. Suddenly he saw in the child before him a sign of division: he will cause the fall and rise of many in Israel; he will be a stumbling block for some. Turning to

⁴ Days of the Lord 233

⁵ Days of the Lord 234

Mary, Simeon said “and you yourself a sword shall pierce.” The shadow of the cross falls over the child and his parents. The sword undoubtedly refers to Mary’s share in the trials of her son: the opposition to his mission, his rejection, his torture and death on the cross.⁶

Simeon said that Jesus would become “a sign to be contradicted.” Mary, the first of Jesus’ disciples (Luke 1:45) was troubled (Luke 1:29); she wondered (Luke 2:33); she did not understand (Luke 2:50); and she reflected and meditated on the mystery (Luke 1:29; 2:19, 51).⁷

The story ends with Anna’s appearance. Recognizing in the infant Jesus the fulfillment of God’s promise, she began to sing the praises of God and began to tell of the child “to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.” When the couple had fulfilled the requirements of the Law they returned to Nazareth. A long silence of thirty years will follow. They will lead a humble and hidden life, an ordinary

⁶ Days of the Lord 234

⁷ Days of the Lord 235

life to all appearances filled with the ups and downs of all family life. In the midst of this it is reported that “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.”⁸

The child Jesus was divine, but he was fully human also. As such he had to learn not only his letters from Mary and Joseph, but also their total dedication to God.

The feast of the Holy Family is not just about the Holy Family, but about our own families as well. Today’s liturgy centers around the person of Christ and it is with Christ in our midst that our families find their direction and fulfillment. The child placed under the care of Mary and Joseph was a mystery to them and as he grew up under their protection all they could do was to place their trust and faith in God. We must do the same.⁹

Like any other worthwhile project, family life, to be successful, has to be given time and energy to develop. It

⁸ Days of the Lord 235

⁹ Desmond Knowles, *Voicing a Thought on Sunday* (Dublin, Columba Press, 1991)148

does not happen automatically. Love, harmony, and mutual respect, the basic ingredients of a happy family, have to be witnessed in action. Attitudes of loving and caring have a deep and lasting influence.¹⁰

Family life never runs smoothly. Today it is more difficult and trying than ever before, but it is the raw material from which we are called to sainthood. On this feast of the Holy Family we ask Jesus, Mary and Joseph to make our families pleasing to God, to make Christ the heart and center of every home in the world.¹¹

¹⁰ Desmond Knowles, 148

¹¹ Desmond Knowles, 149.