

Dear brothers and sisters,

Last Sunday the gospel presented John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord. John pointed out the Savior to the world. Through his ministry, the prophecy of the old took on a new life. "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense, he comes to save you" (Isaiah 35:4).

This Sunday, the gospel presents two striking figures - Mary, the virgin Mother of the Lord, and Joseph, her husband. We shall center on Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. She is the woman who cooperated with God in the redemption of man.

Our key verse is taken from today's First Reading: "The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7:14). This prophecy came during a crossroad in the life of Judah, the Southern kingdom of Israel. Ahaz, the king of Judah, and all the people were panicked. Pekah, king of Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Rezin, king of Aram, were set to attack, pillage and overthrow Judah. The Lord intervened through the Prophet Isaiah, saying to Ahaz the king of Judah, "Remain tranquil and do not fear; let not your courage fail before these two stumps of smoldering brands" (Isaiah 7:3-4)

Further, the Lord asked Ahaz to request a sign as assurance that God was going to protect him and the people of Judah. Ahaz declined hypocritically, saying that he would not tempt the Lord. But it was not out of piety or respect, but hypocrisy. He was more interested in seeking help from Assyria than trusting in the Lord.

The Lord gave him a sign anyway, "The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The Angel Gabriel sent by God, recalled the prophecy while addressing Mary. The Prophecy signaled the dawn of salvation of God's people. The promise God made to "our fathers to Abraham and to his descendants" (Luke 1:55) had come to fulfillment.<sup>1</sup>

That Virgin, in question was Mary, betrothed to Joseph of the house David. She was to be the mother of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit spoke through St Paul, when he said, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption" (Galatians 4:5).

God could have redeemed mankind in any other way, but instead chose to take on human flesh, while remaining God. Pope St Leo the Great Put it this way,

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<sup>1</sup> "I will raise up your offspring after you, sprung from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom. He it is who shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

No doubt the Son of God in his omnipotence could have taught and sanctified men by appearing to them in a semblance of human form as he did to the patriarchs and prophets, when for instance he engaged in a wrestling contest or entered into conversation with them; or when he accepted their hospitality; and even ate the food they set before him. But these appearances were only types, signs that mysteriously foretold the coming of one who would take a true human nature from the stock of the patriarchs who had gone before him. (Saint Leo the Great, *The Mystery of Our Reconciliation with God*, Office of the Readings, Tuesday of Third Sunday of Advent, Year A).

Being pure Spirit and existence, God needs flesh and blood in order to redeem man. Mary accepted God's invitation and provided them by assenting to be the mother of God who came in the flesh. In a fascinating account of Mary's cooperation with our heavenly Father's plan of salvation, God sent the Angel Gabriel to make the proposal to Mary. The Angel's first words to Mary were, "Hail, full of grace the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28).

But how can the hope of a whole people be addressed to a fourteen year old woman? Mary, being steeped in the Old Testament Scripture, knew exactly that the hope of

her people was addressed to her in person<sup>2</sup>. Naturally, "She was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29).

At that point, the Angel reassured her, explaining the dimension this will take: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus, He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

Mary expressed the concern that she was a virgin, otherwise she would not have said, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Luke I:34).

The Angel explained to Mary that our Lord's conception would not be according to the normal run of things among men, but through God's Almighty power. At that point, Mary in a marvelous exercise of "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5) said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). That sealed the cooperation of a creature in the redemption of man.

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<sup>2</sup> "Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem. Behold: your king is coming to you" (Zechariah 9:9, Zephaniah 3:14)

This is in contrast to the first Eve, who did not heed God's plan. Mary said yes to God and the miracle of incarnation happened. She became the Mother of God and our Mother in order of grace.

It also is befitting to acknowledge the wonderful cooperation of St Joseph. He too listened to God and took Mary his wife, into his home. He gave us an example of a life in tune with God. That gave him the firmness he needed in order to protect the life of the baby Jesus and his mother. He was not swayed by anti-life or legalistic public opinions that would have snuffed life out the baby in the womb and his mother. Joseph stood up in defense of life.

Mary and Joseph were totally open to God's will. Their examples invite us to do the same. "Let God enter; he is the king of glory." (Psalm 24:7, 10).

We fail to open our hearts to God when we succumb to the temptation to follow our own designs and not God's commandments. We do this whenever we chose death over life, abortion over having babies, convenience over charity.

In the world, we sometimes find ourselves in the midst of challenges, trials and sorrows of life. Mary speaks to us in

such moments with the same word she spoke to Juan Diego when she appeared to him on the hill of Tepeyac near Mexico city.

"Listen and understand, my humblest son. There is nothing to frighten and distress you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and let nothing upset you. Is it not I, your Mother, who is here? Are you not under my protection? Are you not, fortunately, in my care?"

Mary Mother of Christ, pray for us.