The Birth of John the Baptist

As for every pregnant woman, the hour has come for Elizabeth. Within history, childbirth for a woman constitutes an absolutely normal event, although joyful for the parents and relatives.

However, St. John the Baptist presents a different aspect. The parents were elderly; and the woman was barren. Therefore, within human limitations, conception and birth were impossible. But before God, impossible things do not exist. Therefore, the old man and the old woman have been able to receive the gift of a child.

To understand it totally, we must take into account another detail: what interests the author of the Gospel is not the historic detail of the elderly parents or the biological fact of sterility.

Those details are already found in an exemplary way in the history of Abraham and Sarah. Of interest is that these details transmit a fundamental certainty: the conviction that John the Baptist was not simply the result of a biological coincidence.

It is presupposed that in the birth of John two factors have intervened: on the one hand, acting is the human reality of the parents who love each other. At the same time, the power of God which guides the history of mankind is of influence in a decisive way.

The proof of that power is the miracle of the fecundity of an old man and an old woman. Its result, the birth of John the Baptist. It is he who, within the line of the prophets of Israel, prepares immediately the way for Jesus.

On this background, the history of man is perfectly understood. Following the tradition of the family, the relatives want to name him Zechariah.

The parents, nevertheless, know that the child is a gift from God and God has destined him to fulfill his work. Therefore, they name him John as the angel told them (LK 1, 13).

And John means: “God is merciful.” Through this child, God truly manifests himself merciful to these parents.

And He manifests himself even more merciful with the world because He gives it the Precursor of His own Divine Son.

In all biblical history let us remember, for example, the cases of Abraham or Peter. The imposition – laying on of hands – by God (or Jesus) means the election or naming for an extraordinary mission.

So then, since his own birth, bearing the name which God has indicated, John appears as a Chosen One who must fulfill that great mission which God has entrusted to him.

Now Zechariah’s muteness ends. The muteness was a sign of the truth of the words from the angel who announces to him the birth of a child. Before the presence of God, human reality must be silent, objections end, resistance ends. As a sign of the work of God who upon acting silences the things of this world… is the muteness of Zechariah.

But once that Work of God is realized, once the child is given the indicated name, the word comes anew. The first words pronounced by the open lips of Zechariah are a hymn of praise.

In the birth of the Precursor, the time of salvation is announced, the time to proclaim the marvels of God. From the small circle of neighbors and relatives comes and is extended throughout the mountain of Judea, the news of the extraordinary events. The news and the message of salvation seek to be extended to broader spaces. It has the destiny and the power to conquer the world.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Gospel reminds us: “the hand of God was with him.” I believe that God will also be with us if we prepare, like John, the ways of the Lord; if we convert our heart.

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