



Birth of the Precursor of the Lord

1. Let us recollect ourselves in Prayer – Statio

Prayer of Cardinal Mercier to the Holy Spirit

Oh God, who has instructed your faithful, enlightening their hearts with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us that in the same Spirit we may have the desire to do good and to enjoy always his comfort.

May there be Glory, adoration, love, and blessing to You Eternal Divine Spirit, Who has brought to earth for us the Saviour of our souls. And may there be glory and honour to His most adorable Heart Who loves us with an infinite love.

Oh Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You: enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me, teach me what I should do, give me your orders.

I promise to submit myself to all that will happen to me, allowed by You: I ask only that I may know Your Will.

2. Prayerful Reading of the Word - Lectio

From the Gospel according to Luke (1, 57-66.80)

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy. Now it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name,' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him. Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. And he lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel.

3. Pondering the Word - Meditatio

3.1. Key to the Reading

This passage of the Gospel forms part of the so called accounts of the infancy of Jesus. In a particular way this text follows the scene of the Visitation of Mary “in the house of Zechariah” (Lk 1, 40) after the event of the Annunciation of the Angel, the messenger of the new creation.

In fact, the Annunciation inaugurates in a joyful way the fulfilment of God’s promise to His People (Lk 1, 26-38). The joy of the new times, which filled Mary, now inundates the heart of Elizabeth. She rejoices with the announcement brought by Mary (Lk 1, 41). Mary, on the other hand, “magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1, 46) because He has worked great things in her, just as He has worked great marvels for His people in need of salvation.

The expression “the time came” reminds us that this reality does not only strike Elizabeth about to give birth, but reveals also something of God’s project. In fact, Saint Paul tells us that when the completion of the time came, God sent His Only Begotten Son “born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption of sons” of God (Gal 4, 4).

In the Gospel Jesus in fact, speaks about the completion of times, especially in the Gospel of John. Two of these times are the wedding at Cana (Jn 2, 1-12) and the agony on the cross where Jesus exclaims that “all is fulfilled” (Jn 19, 30). In the fulfilment of the times Jesus inaugurates an era of salvation. The birth of John the Baptist inaugurates this time of salvation. In fact, at the arrival of the Messiah he exults and leaps in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth (Lk 1, 44). Later on, he will define himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jesus) who exults and rejoices because of the event of the wedding with the bride, the Church (Jn 3, 29).

The son will not be named as his father Zechariah, but John. Zechariah reminds us that God does not forget His people. In fact, his name means “God remembers”. His son will now be

called “God remembers”, because God’s promises were being fulfilled. The prophetic mission of John has to indicate God’s mercy. In fact, he will be called Johanan, that is “God is mercy”. This mercy is manifested in the visit to the People, precisely “as he had promised by the mouth of his holy prophets of ancient times” (Lk 1, 67-70). Thus, the name indicates the mission of the one about to be born. Zechariah will write the name of his son on a tablet so that all could see with admiration (Lk 1, 63). This tablet is the echo of another inscription, written by Pilate to be fixed on the cross of Jesus. This inscription revealed the identity of the mission of the Crucified: “Jesus, the Nazarene, King of the Jews” (Jn 19, 19). This writing also provoked the admiration of those who were in Jerusalem for the feast.

John is the precursor of Jesus in everything. Already since his birth and childhood he points out to Christ. “Who will this child be? He is “the voice which cries out in the desert” (Jn 1, 23), impelling all to prepare the way of the Lord. He is not the Messiah (Jn 1, 20), but he indicates this with his preaching and above all with his life style of asceticism in the desert. Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit grew strong. He lived in the desert until the day he appeared openly to Israel”. (Lk 1, 80).

3.1.1. Questions to direct the meditation and the carrying out

- What has struck you in this passage and in the reflection?

- John identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom. According to you, what is the meaning of this image?
- John the Baptist has always been seen by the Church as its type. He is the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Does this have some relevance for our daily life?

4. Oratio

Let us bless the Lord together with Zechariah (Lk 1, 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited his people, he has set them free,
and he has established for us a saving power
in the House of his servant David,
just as he proclaimed,
by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times,
that he would save us from our enemies
and from the hands of all those who hate us,
and show faithful love to our ancestors,
and so keep in mind his holy covenant.
This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham,
that he would grant us, free from fear,
to be delivered from the hands of our enemies,
to serve him in holiness and uprightness in his presence,
all our days.
And you, little child,
you shall be called Prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the faithful love of our God
in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us,
to give light to those who live in darkness
and the shadow dark as death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

5. Contemplatio

Let us all together adore the mercy and the goodness of God repeating in silence:
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen