

31 December 2017 (Feast of the Holy Family, Year B)

Genesis 15:1-6,21:1-3; Psalm 127(128):1-5; Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19; Luke 2:22-40.

An upright and devout man.

On this feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Church puts before us for our consideration three simple portraits: Abram, Simeon and Anna. These three people are meant to compliment the portraits of the three persons forming the holy family. The thread that links these six people is obedience to God's will.

The first reading from the book of Genesis speaks of Abram and his relationship with God. The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews is a reflection on Abram's total trust in God. God had promised Abram that he was going to be the father of a great people, but thus far Abram had been childless. Since Abram trusted in God's promise, he was given the son he desired. Even though this son was meant to be the one through whom God's promise of many descendants could be achieved, this did not stop Abram from giving up his only son at God's request, thus demonstrating the strength of his trust in God.

In the gospel reading we meet two people, Simeon and Anna, who had dedicated their whole life to God. We do not know anything else about these two people except what we read in today's gospel story. Luke tells us that they had built their whole life on God's word and had given up everything in order to serve God. Both were rewarded with the gift of meeting Jesus in the temple and recognising him as the one who was to save us from our sins.

Against the portraits of these holy people we are invited to look at the commitment of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Earlier in his gospel Luke has already told us of Mary's willingness to live God's will in her life. When the angel Gabriel invited her to become part of God's plan by accepting to be the mother of God's son, she accepted, even though she could not fully understand how this could be possible. Her famous words: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word' (Lk 1:37), witness to her openness to God's will.

Similarly we can speak of Joseph. Although we do not know much about the husband of Mary, we can imagine his surprise at the knowledge that his beloved wife was with child, before they had gone to live together! Whose child was this? The gospel of Matthew tells us of Joseph's dilemma and of his dream wherein he too was invited to become part of God's plan by taking Mary and her child to his home.

Finally we look at Jesus who, as he grows older, is constantly speaking about his Father's will, even when his obedience to the Father and his speaking out for the Truth lead him to die on the cross. At the garden Jesus too prays: 'Not my will but yours be done' (Lk 22:42).

As we continue our Christmas celebrations and meditate this small family in Bethlehem, we realise that they are holy not because they are different than the rest of us, but because they devoted themselves to doing God's will in their life. In the Our Father we constantly pray: 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' Like the people in today's readings, we too are called to participate in God's plan. As human beings we are created in God's image and likeness and invited to be co-creators with God; as Christians we are asked to live like his son.

Can we once again commit ourselves to living God's will every day of our life? Can we promise that as we start a new year, we place God's will first?

Happy New Year!

Fr Mario