

Gospel text

Matthew 1: 18-25

18 This is the account of the origins of Jesus the Messiah. Mary, her mother, when she had become engaged to Joseph, and before they began to live together, became pregnant because of the Holy Spirit. 19 Now, as Joseph, her husband, was a man of integrity and did not want to subject her to public mockery, he thought of repudiating her secretly. 20 When he had thought about what he was going to do, behold a message from the Lord came to him in a dream, which said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary with you, your wife, for what was conceived in her comes from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will liberate his people from their waywardnesses". 22 All these events led to the complete understanding of what the prophet said with these words:

Behold, the virgin girl will be pregnant and will give birth to a son,
And he will receive the name of Emmanuel,

which translates to "God in our midst." 24 When he woke up, Joseph did what the Lord asked him to do in his message and took his wife with him. 25 However, he did not have sex with her until she gave birth to her son, to whom he gave the name Jesus.

Gospel commentary - Homily

Learn to live in disorderly world

When you read a Gospel passage like this Sunday, you almost always read it in the context of what you are going through, even if you do not recognize it right away. For example, for several days, I have experienced the frustrations of having to rebuild a computer system that I do not master and the fear of not succeeding. At work, I keep wasting time with a difficult employee who does not hesitate to express his rage. And the rotating strikes are coming in to ruin my great planning. I feel like I'm losing control over everything, I feel dispossessed of my familiar world. In a similar situation, what do we take away from this account of the birth of Jesus?

A sentence from the story focuses attention: "Now, before they had lived together, Marie was pregnant." Forget for now the religious explanation. We are faced with a situation where everything does not go as planned. This couple had no doubt dreamed of a tidy life, with the planned stages of dating, common life, the birth of the child. And now the child is conceived at the wrong time, and now Joseph finds himself with a child who does not seem to be his. Let us position ourselves at that time, and we can imagine the extent of the drama. Two people see their lives completely turned upside down.

I find that we usually immerse this scene too quickly in holy water by immediately bringing in the messengers of God. It will be said: Mary knew everything, because the angel Gabriel had already explained to her what was going on; Joseph, for his part, was immediately presented with the whole plan of God as soon as he became aware of the situation. By doing this, you amputate the narrative from a fundamental dimension. Because it is no coincidence that the basis of the story is a situation of "disorder", where things do not happen as we would have liked. Later, Matthew will describe the uprooting of this family during the flight to Egypt, in the manner of the uprooting experienced by the Jewish people.

The good news here is that at the core of our disorders and our uprooting, God is with us, He is Emmanuel. This is in contrast to our current perception, a perception that is abundantly found in the Old Testament: when I am prosperous, that everything is going well in my life, that I can satisfy all my ambitions, that my children are fairing well, I have the sign that God is with me. What is said here is totally different. Not that our perception is totally false, but it is too limited. Our story says this: on the contrary, what you considered a disorder was a source of liberation for you, thanks to the Spirit of God.

Under the image of disorder, everyone can graft something of their life. The adopted person can place their questions about their parents of origin. Couples who have experienced divorce, when they had dreamed of an eternal bond like so many others, will also recognize their situation. Do you think that homosexuals, males and females, wanted to be these "exceptional" cases of our society? We can think of all these young people who cannot follow the normal learning cycle. We understand Joseph's reaction to want to repudiate Mary: like any self-respecting man, he cannot accept such disorder. He is like us, wanting a "correct" life, without problems.

Jesus is the fruit of this disorder. This undoubtedly marked him to the point of having this surprising compassion for all the marginalized. But what is even more important is his conviction that at the heart of these events and situations that we would willingly reject, the Spirit of God is at work to transform them into a liberating event. All of this makes one think of this Labrador dog in Switzerland, amputated by a paw, who had developed an exceptional sense of smell because of his handicap and, thereby, would save the life of a skier buried under an avalanche: thus a man owed his life to a three-legged dog.

On the eve of celebrating the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve, let us remember that this story was made possible thanks to Joseph's decision to take Mary home, despite his dismay. It was a gesture of faith. The same call awaits us.