

19. December 2019

“Yes to the will of God”

*Lk 1,5-25*

*In the days of King Herod of Judaea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were upright in the sight of God and impeccably carried out all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years. Now it happened that it was the turn of his section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the priestly custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense all the people were outside, praying. Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you shall name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink; even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the Israelites to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to reconcile fathers to their children and the disobedient to the good sense of the upright, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.' Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I know this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.' The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel, who stand in God's presence, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Look! Since you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened.' Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long. When he came out he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them and remained dumb. When his time of service came to an end he returned home. Some time later his wife Elizabeth conceived and for five months she kept to herself, saying, 'The Lord has done this for me, now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered in public.'*

John the Baptist - the forerunner of Christ's coming - who precedes the Lord in the power of Elijah.

Today we can observe a process which shows similarities:

It is the announcement of the birth of John and the announcement of the birth of the Lord, both by the Archangel Gabriel. And both recipients of the message did not expect such an unusual event: Zechariah because of his age and the advanced age of his wife, and Mary because no one could know who would give birth to the Messiah and under what circumstances this would happen!

But the reactions to the angel's glad tidings were different. While the Virgin Mary faithfully received the Lord's message and offered herself unreservedly to the will of God, Zechariah unbelievably expressed doubts. As a consequence, God silenced him until the promise had been fulfilled.

In this description of the two events lies for us a deep message for the way of following the Lord. In the faithful attitude of the Virgin God's will can be completely fulfilled and man participates directly, he is accepted into the plan of redemption and thus becomes God's co-worker. Let us remember that in some healings the Lord expressly said that man's faith had helped him (*cf. Mk 5,34; 10,52*).

With Zechariah, on the other hand, we see that he doubted, he saw the natural circumstances of an old age as an obstacle and thus did not immediately believe the angel and gave an answer that was not appropriate for what happened! God first let him pass through the experience to be silenced before he found his speech again and praised God for his glorious deeds (*cf. Lk 1,67-80*)!

God desires to find us in Mary's availability, so that his will may be realized in us and with us. This is why the spiritual question is addressed to us: how can we grow into Mary's attitude and how can we overcome doubts and unbelief?

If we consider the following two examples presented to us in Sacred Scripture, in which doubt or unbelief can be seen, then we can discover elements that can complicate simple faith:

In the case of Zechariah, the lack of openness in this situation was probably also connected with the primacy of the human mind; perhaps he was already somewhat resigned and disappointed because the great desire for a child had not been fulfilled! Now he and his wife were already beyond the age at which one had children! So how could it happen?

With the Apostle Thomas, it was his own experience that he wanted to make (*Jn* 20,24-29). This desire to believe only what one experiences sensually, closed him off from accepting the testimony of others.

The primacy of the intellect and the building on one's own experience can thus become an obstacle if intellect and experience occupy a too important place in the hierarchy of values.

So if we have problems simply trusting in God's guidance, as Mary did, we should examine where the difficulties might come from and, above all, ask that the Holy Spirit to overcome the lack of trust. The constant prayer for trust and the daily practice of trust in God will help us! If we learn to perceive our inner narrowings and false bonds and to carry them perseveringly to God, then an ever greater freedom will grow to be able to give the answer of faith to the Lord!