

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE  
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 161221a

Wednesday 21.12.2016

## General audience: at Christmas, hope enters the world

In the last general audience before Christmas, Pope Francis dedicated his catechesis to the moment in which hope entered the world, with the Incarnation of the Son of God. “The same Isaiah had preannounced the birth of the Messiah: “Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”, and “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit”, he said, citing the words of the prophet Isaiah, who has guided the catechesis of recent weeks, and which “reflect the meaning of Christmas: God fulfils His promise, making Himself man; He does not abandon His people, He draws near to them to the point of divesting Himself of His divinity. In this way, God shows His faithfulness and establishes a new Kingdom, which gives new hope to humanity. And what is this hope? Eternal life”.

“When we speak about hope, often we refer to what is not in man’s power and is not visible. Indeed, what we hope goes beyond our strength and our view. But the Nativity of Christ, ushering redemption, speaks to us of a different hope, a hope that is reliable, visible and comprehensible, as it is rooted in God. He enters the world and gives us the strength to journey with Him: God walks with us in Jesus, and walking with Him towards the fullness of life gives us the strength to stay in a new way in the present, even if it is burdensome. So, for a Christian to hope means the certainty of journeying with Christ towards the Father Who awaits us. Hope is never still, hope is always in motion and enables us to walk on. This hope, that the Child of Bethlehem gives us, offers an objective, a good destiny for the present, the salvation of humanity, blessedness to those who trust in merciful God. St. Paul summarises all this in the expression, ‘For in this hope we were saved’”.

“That is, journeying in this world, with hope, we are saved. And here we can pose ourselves the question, each one of us: do I walk with hope or is my inner life static and closed? Is my heart a closed drawer or is it a drawer open to hope that ensures I walk not alone, but with Jesus?”

The Holy Father went on to note that many Christians, during the time of Advent, prepare a Nativity display in their homes, a tradition that dates back to St. Francis of Assisi and which, in its simplicity, transmits an atmosphere of hope in which the characters are immersed. “First let us note the place where Jesus was born: Bethlehem. A small village in Judea where a thousand years before David was born, the shepherd chosen by God as the king of Israel. Bethlehem was not a capital city, and for this reason it was favoured by divine providence, which loves to act through the small and the humble. In that place, the greatly anticipated ‘son of David’ was born, Jesus, in Whom the hope of God and the hope of man encounter each other”.

“Then let us look at Mary, mother of hope. With her ‘yes’ she opened the door of our world to God: her girl’s heart was full of hope, all inspired by faith; and so God chose her and she believed in His world. She, who for nine months was the ark of the new and eternal Covenant, contemplates the Child in the crib and sees in Him the love of God, Who comes to save His people and the whole of humanity. Next to Mary there is Joseph, descendent of Jesse and David; he too believed the words of the angel, and looking at Jesus in the manger, he reflects that the Child comes from the Holy Spirit and that God Himself ordered Him to be called ‘Jesus. In that name there is hope for every man, because through that son of woman, God will save humanity from death and sin. Therefore, it is important to look at the Nativity scene!”

Other characters are the shepherds, who represent the humble, and the poor who await the Messiah, the “consolation of Israel” and the “redemption of Jerusalem”. In that Child they see the fulfilment of promises and hope that God’s salvation will finally come to each one of them. He who trusts in his own sureties, especially material, does not await God’s salvation. Let us be clear about this: sureties will not save us; the only surety that saves us is that of hope in God. It saves us because it is strong and it enables us to journey in life with joy, with the desire to do good, with the desire to become happy for eternity. The little ones, the shepherds, instead trust in God; they hope in Him and rejoice when they recognise in that Child the sign indicated by the angels”.

“It is indeed the choir of angels that announces from on high the great plan that the Child fulfils: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased’. Christian hope is expressed in praise and gratitude to God, who established His kingdom of love, justice and peace”.

“In these days, contemplating the creche, we prepare for the Nativity of the Lord”, Francis concluded. “It will truly be a feast if we welcome Jesus, the seed of hope that God places in the furrows of our personal and community history. Every ‘yes’ to Jesus Who comes to us is a bud of hope. Let us trust in this bud of hope, in this ‘yes’: ‘Yes, Jesus, You can save me, You can save me’. A happy Christmas of hope to all!”

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