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VATICAN - AVE MARIA - Mgr Luciano Alimandi - The Mystery of Joy

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - “John replied: 'No one can have anything except what is given him from heaven. 'You yourselves can bear me out. I said, "I am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent to go in front of him." 'It is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy I feel, and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less. ” (Jn 3, 27-29). With these words, the Precursor of the Lord reveals the mystery of his joy. The words culminate with a concise programme for life, a life of sincere humility: “Jesus must grow greater, I must grow less”.

Genuine joy is hidden in the mystery of Jesus' humility: “learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11, 29). Jesus longs to fill the hearts of his disciples with joy: “I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.” (Jn 15, 11); but they are slow to respond to the call to joy, because they find it difficult to set out on the path.

Whereas the Virgin Mary, took this path from the start and never left it. She is the creature totally humble, living her life in such a way as to please only the Lord, to live solely for His glory; in other words, she sought nothing for herself: she was the perfectly free creature, in love with God.

This is why her Immaculate Heart is the dwelling place of joy and it was this messianic joy - the joy of the Messiah - which she carried to her cousin Elizabeth, when she went to visit her. The joy of the Infant Jesus, whom she bore in her virginal womb, overflowed from her soul, like a river, and embraced the elderly relative who was pregnant with John the Baptist. The latter “leaped for joy” (Lk 1, 44) and was never to forget that touch of grace.

When, years later, the Precursor of the Lord calls the people to conversion, to prepare the way for the Lord, he will testify to everyone that mystery which had conquered him. It was the mystery of the Advent of Christ, who, to be welcomed, must to be recognised; but He is only recognised by those who “lower ” and “empty” themselves as Saint Augustine says so well: “what is the meaning of: prepare the way, if not: be humble of heart? Take the example of the Baptist who, mistaken for the Christ, said he was not what people thought him to be … he remained humble. He saw where salvation is to be found. He realised he was simply a lamp and he feared being extinguished by the wind of pride” (Disc. 293, 3)

Pride is the root of our “eternal” sadness, whereas humility opens the door of the soul to the greatest joys. This is why when we were children, joy was the natural companion of our days. We were happy to be what we were: little people! As we became “grownups” this joy left us because our ways were no longer its ways. Those who, despite the years, have remained at heart simple, poor and humble, like a child, sooner or later, will have discovered that the joy of the simple is the joy of Jesus, that it is a gift of His love for us, which comes from Heaven and, therefore, cannot be given by the world. It is like the peace, which Jesus gives us: “Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (Jn 14, 27).

The world knows no joy, only its surrogate, pleasure: pleasure of the senses, power, success, self- affirmation, luxury, “comfort”… But pleasure is costly and quick to leave the human heart. Once consumed it is gone. And man follows it desperately, deceiving himself that, sooner or later, it will satisfy him, stay with him, but this will never happen. Pleasure is a tyrant, it is not kind to the heart: it uses it and then discards it.

John the Baptist, while still in his mother's womb, “savoured” true joy, the joy of the fullness of life which God gives if we remove the barriers of pride and rest with Him, like a child, asleep in his mother's arms. Little, 'great' John understood, deep in his soul, realised that the Lord came on this earth to bring happiness to all mankind, to reconcile us with Heaven, to lead us back, to those celestial heights from which we fell.

Christmas is the way that God, infinitely Blessed, offers His children the joy of joys: the Saviour. The Angels announced at His birth: “'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. 11Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12And here is a sign

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for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'" (Lk 2, 10-12). The sign of this "great joy" is "great humility". To discover the mystery of joy we must humble ourselves before God, become little, repentant for our sins, we must serve others rather than let ourselves be served. The proud, the presumptuous, like Herod and his companions, who do not "go down" to Bethlehem, but prefer to stay in their own "I", fail to recognise the joy which is in the good tidings; they prefer wretched self pleasure to the inestimable joy of God. Yet those who welcome Jesus, lose nothing, they only gain!
"If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation…He takes nothing away, and he gives everything!" (Pope Benedict XVI, 24 April 2005) (Agenzia Fides 17/12/2008)

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