

The last candle is lit, the countdown is almost done and a lot of us have switched to autopilot in order to get everything done in time: there is shopping to do, gifts to wrap, meals to prep, family and work obligations that have to be fulfilled. In this frenzied season, Christmas Day rushes in and often leaves us with a sense of being let down.

With holiday music in the background and every TV show and holiday movie telling us what the “real meaning of Christmas is” we spur on our efforts to create that magical experience for the children, to show our thoughtfulness and love to our family and friends, to bring about impossible reconciliations and in our attempts to make everything beautiful, grand and unforgettable so many people find this the loneliest time of the year. There is a terrible misconception going around that the person who gives the most gets the most out of this season and walks away the winner. Look back at the Advent Wreath and notice that the last candle is purple, the color symbolizing preparedness and realize that it is reminding us that we have the important task of preparing our hearts and minds for something much more important than a family dinner or beautifully wrapped toys. Are we preparing to welcome our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into our lives in deeper and more profound way this year?

Today’s Gospel is about The Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth and rarely do we see in the Bible such a powerful encounters with Christ. First is John the Baptist, though still in the womb, is transformed by his encounter with Jesus by being filled with Holy Spirit and he becomes the last and greatest of the prophets entrusted with turning the hearts of mankind the proper worship of God, to repentance for their sins and to prepare the way of the Lord. Few men will ever be as blessed as him. But it is Elizabeth’s encounter with Christ that is perhaps the most profound.

How did Elizabeth know that Mary was with child? After the Annunciation Mary made haste to go help her cousin so she was between a few hours to no more than a few days pregnant. Yet Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognizes Jesus calling Him, “My Lord” fully understanding His Divine and Human Personhood, while her words of greetings to Mary, joining with those of the Angel Gabriel, give us one of the most beautiful and powerful prayers.

So through His Mother’s intercession, the first two people Jesus encounters after His incarnation is an unborn child and old woman, both would have been considered low in social status, both considered unimportant yet both infinitely blessed because they were prepared to meet their Lord and Savior became joyful saints.

Why was Elizabeth so prepared? Because she was meek, she had been a pious and holy woman who put her trust in God being thankful for what she had and when blessed with the miracle of her son, put her trust further in her God instead of taking pride in something she knew she had no control over. And her faith echoes that of her cousin Mary; for by entrusting herself to God, abandoning herself to God’s will she shares in Mary’s vocation that: “Thy will be done.”

Meekness is rooted in the gifts of Faith, Hope and Charity, gifts that continue to give as we continue to nurture these virtues, for they help us realize that all we have comes from God and all we have to give comes from God and this reality keeps us open and ready for Him to be the focus of our lives and keeps us prepared to greet Him and do His will in all things.

The Prophet Micah tells of the Messiah, a man who is to be born in a humble, small town because true greatness and power come from God, to whom God has chosen. We can do nothing to bring it about on our own; great cities don't make great people, greatness comes from God and that is the message we heard repeated in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Rare offerings, expensive donations, elaborate rituals mean nothing if that is all it they remain purely externals. Rather it is a humble spirit and contrite that heart that opens us up to doing the will of the Father and true union with Him, and now because of the Incarnation, we have the perfect high priest and the perfect offering so by uniting ourselves to Jesus we united ourselves to the Father because Jesus' sacrifice is unique; it completes, surpasses, and fulfills all other sacrifices and is both a gift from the Father and an offering of the Son to the Father. This sacrifice is consummated on the Cross. Thus we participate in Christ's sacrifice in two ways: receiving and offering. So unless we are prepared to receive Christ, we can't participate in this perfect offering, we can't attain union with our loving Father and we can never, find the peace and solace which are the hallmarks of the sacred holiday that is quickly coming upon us. And Christ is the merciful High Priest who always is reaching out to us as he did to John the Baptist and Elizabeth. His mother, who is also our mother and also there to intercede for us.

So let us prepare ourselves for all they have to offer us, for coming of Christ by turning our hearts and wills to God. Let the Mass be the important family meal this year. Let prayers be the most thoughtful and sincerest of the gifts we give. Let God be the source of our satisfaction, peace and joy and thus we can use this season to evangelize our family and friends who have drifted away from the real reason for this holy season. Let us grow in holiness during this Year of Mercy and every year after, focusing on our personal and loving relationship with God for which we were created, and may our hearts leap with joy every time Christ makes His presence known to us, especially in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. May we be blessed because we believe what has been spoken to us by the Lord has been fulfilled.