

The liturgy of the Church, in order to solemnize this great mystery of the **nativity of Jesus**, offers to the faithful four Masses, with four different readings: Saturday's evening Mass, midnight Mass, the Mass at dawn and the day Mass – the one we are celebrating in this moment.

Every Mass has its own liturgy of the Word, some particular passages from the Gospel that illuminate, from different points of view and with different nuances, this great mystery; as was done by the four evangelists, who tried to make more available, clear, and highlighted some specific aspects, that they thought more relevant to us.

The day Mass we are now celebrating is the high point of this liturgy, because it chooses from the Gospels this **magnificent prologue of the Gospel of St. John, which is also the apex of Revelation.**

Of the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), St. John – and his Gospel – is represented by the **symbol of the eagle.**

As you know, each Gospel is represented with a particular figure: the man, the lion, the bull and the eagle; John is the eagle, because he looks out from a sublime, from the highest possible viewpoint; so with a philosophic, theological vision, that runs the risk of losing a little of the historic, practical, concrete content that I would like to submit for your reflection today.

The prologue of the Gospel of St. John is a synopsis; it is thought that it was a hymn that the Church used to sing in the beginning, to proclaim its faith.

The **Creed** that we will declaim shortly is not the one that the original Christian communities used to recite; it is in fact a Creed that was created through dogmatic formulations and is partially influenced by the issues raised by the heretics; hence it is quite “theoretical”.

The “real” Creed is the one contained in the prologue of the fourth Gospel, as well as in other hymns that we can find, for example, in the letters of St. Paul; it is, in fact, the grand celebration, in joy and in praise, of what God intends to accomplish for us, of what He accomplished but, most of all, of what He wants and can accomplish for us!

Today, we are here to celebrate Christmas, but for sure we do not just celebrate the event of 2000 years ago, because, otherwise, this would be vain and pointless...

Today we celebrate Christmas, that is, the birth of Jesus in our hearts!

God wants to be born and grow in our hearts!

This prologue is so awe-inspiring that each one of its verses would deserve a comment.

I confess that, after reading it, I became converted, I became a Christian, a believer thanks to the reading of the Gospel of St. John; imagine how powerful it is!

Today I have decided to choose three verses that I will comment for you concisely; **three verses that have the potential, if we make ourselves available, to change our life; because this is what we are dealing with here!**

Faith is strength, light, and a truth that has to revolutionize our lives!

It must change them!

If it does not change them, it means that we have not embraced God.

As St. John reminds us in the fifth verse:

1. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

How can the light shine in the darkness?

It's a paradox, a contradiction, because we know that when light shines, darkness recedes; this morning it was dark and at some point the light appeared; and, as it appeared, automatically the darkness went away. It is impossible for the light and the darkness to coexist!

But, the Gospel says precisely that the light and the darkness coexist!

How is it then possible, that they coexist?

As you understand, **we are not talking here about the light in this world; but about another light: it's the light of God, it's the light of the Spirit, it's the light of our intellect, it's a light that knocks at the door of our hearts, but the door does not open...**

The light shines in the darkness: when you go to Confession, what are you showing? Exactly the fact that the light is in the middle of darkness, it dwells in darkness!

And it's the same for the Church: it is present in the world, the Pope last night celebrated this grandiose liturgy, in the whole world midnight Mass was celebrated, we've been celebrating every year, for 2000 years, the liturgy of the light, also at Easter, every Sundays...

And yet, the world is more and more shrouded in darkness!

In the last few years we feel like under siege, the forces of evil appear to advance and about to overpower the light; yet, the Gospel today is telling us that **the Light shines and the darkness is not going to prevail!**

Today it's Christmas:

then, my dearest, we have first to understand whether we are in the light or we are in the darkness, if we want to be light or keep allowing the darkness to occupy us and dwell in us.

Everything, in fact, depends on this decision.

Faith is a choice: I want to be a son of light! I want to live my life in the light of God and of His word!

2. The second verse I would like to discuss is the twelfth: *But as many as received Him* – we could say, as many as received this light - *to them gave He power to become the sons of God.*

The light is in the darkness, **we are the darkness**; if we embrace this light, we become sons of God, if we do not, we remain man.

How many times you say: “eh, but father, we are men, we have to live in this world... how can we pray every day with all the things we have to do?”.

But, then, who did God come for?!?

What did He come to do?!?

When we say “but, father, I have to live in the world, I have to do the things of the world, I do not have time for prayer, I cannot commit myself to do this... but, you know how the world is, there are some pressures...”, **we nullify the coming of Jesus!**

But, Jesus has come for this world!

Exactly because you are in the world, exactly because the world is made this way, you must embrace the light; because, if you don't embrace it, you stay in the dark; you do not become son of God.

This is our challenge!

We need to understand whether we are contented being “people of the flesh”, as St. Paul would say.

When we talk about the “flesh” we are not making reference to the sexual realm, but we are talking about men who live for this world: to be “people of the flesh” means to be conceited, arrogant, greedy, avid..., to go through life with the wellbeing of our body, in this world, as the goal.

Those who are not people of the flesh, on the contrary, aspire to live in accordance to the word of God.

Hence, there are no other options: either we are people of the flesh, or we are spiritual people.

So, *to all who welcome Him* in this flesh that is our body, that is our humanity – which Jesus came precisely to change – *He gave the power to become sons of God; in other words, to all who believe in His name.*

This is what faith is: to believe in Jesus and to live a spiritual life, a true life; not a material life, not a life of the flesh.

3. This depends on two things: **faith** and **grace**, as it is said in verse 17: *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

Do you see the leap?

This is why St. John is the eagle: because this is a verse that connects the Old Testament and the New Testament; it shows the limit in the Old Testament, and goes beyond; the limit in man, and the divine gift...

All in a single verse!

The law was given through Moses, the grace and the truth came by Jesus Christ: what is the meaning?

This means that we cannot live our faith by simply following the Law!

Unfortunately, it is possible to be Christians and live according to the Law...

When is this possible?

When we confine our religious practice to a series of obligations: “today it’s Sunday, I must go to Mass; now it’s Christmas I go to Mass; once a year I must confess; I cannot do this because it’s a sin, otherwise I would do it, it’s a shame that it is a sin...”.

And, sooner or later, it will happen as the saying goes: *curiosity killed the cat...*

In fact, if we reason in this way – i.e. “it’s a shame that it is a sin” – sooner or later we will fall in the trap.

You see then **the magnificent gift of Christianity: God donates us the grace, in other words He is presenting us with the ability to go beyond the Law, to do things because of love!**

“How nice! Today it’s Sunday and I can go to Mass.”

“How nice! Today it’s Sunday and I can be with the Lord for a while”!

“How nice! Today it’s Sunday and I can finally rest in God”!

Not, as many instead say: “How are we going to arrange this? We have to do this, this and this... and how do we fit Mass in?”

You see that we you reason in this way, everything collapses.

If someone is organising the weekend and wondering how to fit Mass in, something is very wrong!

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us

Homily, 25th December, 2016

John 1,1-18

father G. Paparone o.p.

And then we are amazed that the world is falling to pieces; that the European community does not want to write in its constitution that we belong to a Christian tradition...; but as a matter of fact, we do not, we no longer do...

If the encounter with God, of which the Mass is the centre and the weekly culmination, is not the most important thing in our life, it means that the most important thing will be something else, and so God is coming second best.

But if God comes second best, He is not significant, and does not help us; how could He?

We go back to the Old Testament, simply to the *Law*.

Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Today, then, let us give thanks to God, because He wants to accord us the grace and the truth, for us to live not as people of the flesh, but as sons of God.

Praised be Jesus Christ.