

**Homily to Community of St. Joseph,
December 21, 2010 Fr Dominic Borg,
OCD**

“For nothing is impossible with God”

When we examine the way God acts it is amazing how much joy it brings to us and it instills amazement and surprise in our life. Let me give you a very quick example. God wants to liberate his people from Egypt. Egypt is the

enemy. Pharaoh is the enemy. As we have read today, prayed together in Psalm 136, God is taking out His people from this bondage. What is the situation? The situation is that Pharaoh made sure that every Jewish male child that was born would be massacred so that Egypt would not have any enemies, so that there would be no charismatic person among them that would create a revolution and bring out these people from under his power.

God comes to Moses, and although the sanctity of Moses is far superior from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet Moses questioned God – Abraham did not, Jacob did not, Isaac did not. But Moses questioned God. Moses, later on was thinking about this God more seriously. And here comes the surprise. A child is born to a Jewish family. The child is not massacred. He is brought up in an Egyptian family, the family of Pharaoh where they will feed him, educate him and when he did not like the food of the Egyptians, while Pharaoh could not find someone to please him with the milk, he brought even the mother of Moses and she was paid to give milk to Moses. She was paid ... and this is the God of surprises.

He is the God who will enter into your Nazareth and my Nazareth, the way He

entered into the Nazareth of Mary, the Nazareth of Galilee. Galilee is the birth place in the Bible of insecurity. “Go to Galilee. I am going to ahead of you, meet me there.” Galilee is the place for you and for me, when we think that we are alone, because they did not teach us how to meet God in our insecurity. They did not teach us the meaning and the power of that expression. “And, lo, I am always with you even to the close of the age.” They did not teach us the meaning of Advent ... that Advent prepares you and me so that when the expression comes “To you today is born a Saviour”, we will be able to recognize this from the signs. We are more like Ahab.. “ask for a sign in time, in heaven and on earth”, to show you that God is with you and you are not alone. “I will not tempt my God.” They forgot to give you a sign. And the angel said to the shepherds “And this is the sign.” The Angel said to the shepherds “To you today is born a Saviour in the house of Bethlehem from the house of David. And this is the sign. You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger.” And this is the sign. They looked at the sign, and they did see the sign. The sign that joins together Bethlehem with Calvary. *The sign is this, you will find a Child wrapped in swaddling clothes.*

And when they took down Jesus Christ from the Cross, they wrapped him in linen cloths. The verb “wrapping”. “In swaddling clothes”, that means kingship. When Solomon was born, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes. And “to you today is born a Saviour”. Luke dared to give the title to Jesus Christ, the title of “Saviour”, and history has proved him right, because the title of Saviour was only reserved to the King, and Jesus Christ is the King of Kings. He is the one who is in command. It is not your crises and my crises, it is not your sickness or your depression or your chaos

that is in command ... it is the Word of God that unfolds itself in history, and faith is seeing the Will of God unfolding in a mysterious way, like finding a woman, a girl of marriageable age. She had no experience of having an experience with man. *"I do not know any man."*, but, she asked "what part do I have to do so that your Word will become a reality in my life, so that your message that I have received will be actualized in my life." And the angel told her, 'be open to the action of the Spirit. The Spirit will do it within you.' This is the Spirit operating, *"and the Spirit of God was hovering over the chaos"* And that Spirit enters into this Word ... the Word that becomes life ... the Word that **is** life .. the Word that Peter said *"to whom shall we go, you have the Words of eternal life"*. This is the Saviour that you and I prepare ourselves for during Advent in order to receive the fulfillment of God's promises.

This year the year A, Cycle A, is very special. It is very special because it is taken from the Gospel of St Matthew. The Gospel of St Matthew dominates Cycle A. We have just finished Cycle C, dominated by St Luke. Now we enter Cycle A. Why is it special? Because the Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel of fulfillment. Nine times Matthew says *"and all this took place so that what the Lord had spoken by the prophets would be fulfilled."* Nine times we find that expression ushering a prophecy being fulfilled, not to mention the many other times that Matthew mentions the word fulfillment, such as for example, in chapter 5 *"I did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, no, I did not come to abolish them, but to bring them to fulfillment."* This is why the Church, especially recently, has been placing great emphasis on the importance of knowing the Old Testament, in order to understand better the New Testament. The New Testament is the

fulfillment of the promises that we find in the Old Testament. As St Augustine used to say "The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is made manifest in the New."

We are not like Origen. Origen was a very smart guy. St Jerome says that he wrote over 6,000 volumes. That is more than any human being on earth can read in his lifetime, and yet, he came up with the conclusion that the Old Testament is not necessary in order to understand the New Testament. It is as if you are saying that a tree does not need roots in order to survive. Of course, we need the Old Testament, and it is unfortunate that so many Catholics abandon the Old Testament. Jesus Christ has His roots in the Old Testament, He was a Jew. And as we have seen today ... Ahab, the sign "and this is the sign ... you will have a Child, and you shall name Him Emmanuel" 'God is with us'. Right at the beginning of the Gospel, Matthew puts us in the Old Testament ... and also Luke ... why do they emphasize so much about the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Why does Luke, also in today's Gospel speak about the Son of David about the ancestor of his father David? – to make sure we know that this guy did not just fall from the sky. There is a history, a history that the truth is in the Old Testament, a history that the more we learn how to unfold it, the more we see the Hand of God operating as a history of Salvation, as a Salvation in history. "And the child you will name him Emmanuel because God is with us." The Gospel of Matthew in chapter 28 ends with these words *"and lo, I am always with you even to the close of the age"*.

This is the beauty of Christmas, brothers and sisters, this is the reason for Advent in our life, so that we prepare ourselves properly, so that when Christmas comes, that

expression “*to you today is born a Saviour*”, that expression “*the Emmanuel*” will not be just an empty statement, but it will mean something to you and to me.

Why is it that during Advent, like Lent, we begin to lose patience, we find ourselves more dominated by prejudice, judgement, anger? We even get angry to the extent that we nearly become ashamed of ourselves, because this is not the proper situation ... of course it is not ... “*my ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts*”. If you are going to have a baby being born, you want everything spick and span, everything clean, hygienic, the linen will be sterilized, everything ... not with God ... He will bring a baby into the world, there, with the dirt of the animals in the cave. He will go to Bethlehem, a place of no importance to bring a woman, blessed among all women. How did God choose us? What did he see in you and in me? To call us to be Christians, to call us to Carmel, to use us as signs for other people, bringing His mercy and His love to others ... what did He see in us? Perhaps, like Moses we should question Him too. We should question Him like Moses did. ‘Why send me? I am not capable. Send my brother ... he speaks well. He is a better speaker. Send him.’ God said – ‘You go.’

And the same expression that we find constantly in the Old Testament “*fear not*”, it comes to Mary “*fear not*”, it comes to Zachariah “*fear not*”, it comes to Joseph “*fear not*”, and it comes to you and to me today too, that when we are face to face with our weaknesses let us remember that God has surrounded us with these weaknesses to appreciate the value of a Saviour in our life otherwise that statement at Christmas will be an empty statement. Christmas will come and Christmas will go [“to you today is born a Saviour”. So what! Carry on.] Christmas

is something for you and for me all year round. “*And lo I am with you always*”... the Emmanuel ... sometimes we walk like horses, with these blinders, unable to see this History of Salvation. Jesus Christ entered into the synagogue the way He entered into your heart and my heart today with His Words. This Scripture has been fulfilled for you in your hearing. It is not something of the past. It is ongoing, constantly “*the Lord is with you*” God is with us constantly, to the close of the age.

At that moment when you think that you are panicking and you are alone, that is the moment when once more, from the Cross, “*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me*”; from the Cross, comes the cry of Jesus Christ anticipating our loneliness so that when we think that we are alone, that doesn’t mean that God doesn’t care. He has already anticipated us and He is present in our Galilee. He is going to show His power in our Nazareth. He is going to bring the Saviour and this is the sign. Which sign brothers and sisters? We make many times the sign of the Cross, we say many times ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’ Is it just an empty gesture? Do we know what we are saying? Have we learned the lesson from the official, from the centurion? Beholding the Cross, beholding Jesus Christ, he said “*Truly that must have been the Son of God*”. “*Truly this is the one who God has sent to show His love for you*”. God loved the world so much that He gave His Son.”

And then we continue on to question Him. We look at the sign, the sign of the Scapular, coming under the protection of Mary, and if we have accepted Mary as our Mother, why is it sometimes so difficult to imitate Her? Why is it sometimes so difficult to listen “*Do whatever He tells you.*” Why is it sometimes difficult to render service to

others. *“Mary went with haste to be of service to Elizabeth.”*

[It is too difficult in this community – serving always - it is time for someone else]

No, brothers and sisters. *“You call me Master and Teacher, and you are right, yet, here I am as one who serves.”*

So, when we come together, like today, come together to worship, to pray, come together to receive another new member in our community, come together to hear a member of the community make the promise, it is another Word of God for you and for me, reminding us of the past, telling us ‘by now, you should be mature to understand that event, that you did it more like a sign, unable to see the meaning behind that sign, the way that sometimes you make the sign of the Cross, unable to see the meaning behind the sign of the Cross.

It is no wonder that the Fathers of the Church say that Jesus Christ on the Cross is the face of God the Father radiating light in the darkness of our life. The shepherds were surrounded with darkness, in the middle of the night, the way the Exodus took place in the middle of the night. At midnight I was struck, and it is at midnight that there is the Passover “Pesach”, “Pe” meaning mouth, “Sach” meaning speak. The mouth speaks “Glory to God in the Highest and Peace on Earth to the people of Good will.”

The mouth speaks, it has to speak. It has to praise God. It has to thank Him. We say with St Augustine: *“Oh happy fault, that it deserves such a big Saviour”* ...That is why Christmas instills joy in our lives ... that is why constantly the word Joy comes more quickly from our mouth. That is why we yearn to experience the peace. We become like a dry land, like a desert, the wilderness, ready to receive any drop of rain that God,

out of His goodness to us, He is ready to shower us with.

St. John says *“God lavishes His love upon us”* He lavishes it to the point that He is the Prodigal Father, not the Prodigal Son, it is God lavishing His love. We love Him because He loved us first. God loved the world so much that He gave His Son. So, as we stand here now, at the threshold of this great feast of Christmas, let us not make out of it, brothers and sisters, a one day event, but let us look at it as a history, a history of salvation, your salvation, my salvation. A history of God’s love that is eternal.

God’s love comes to the shepherd, to you and to me. This will be the sign. The community is a sign for you and for me. It is a sign of God’s love. That is why the community is a gift from God. It is not something that you choose. God gives you this community for your own good, to mold you, to form you, because the community helps you to learn how to be humble, and like Moses learn how to listen to the Word of God and you will reach that stage, when like Moses, you experience yourself surrounded with a dark cloud, but like Moses also, you hear God speaking to you through the dark cloud “And the glory of God descended on Mount Sinai.” “And the glory of God descended in Bethlehem”. “And the glory of God in the sky speaks about that moment, the hour of my glory.”

So when we are faced with Bethlehem and with Nazareth, let us remember that nothing is impossible with God. So much so that St Augustine says “God made everything out of nothing, that is beautiful, but what is more beautiful He makes Saints out of sinners.”, and we have that experience; and for such an experience we Thank Our God !