

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 2:15-18, 20)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this Child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – the virtue of simplicity of heart

The simple shepherds – God's chosen witnesses of Christ's birth. Although many generations had been waiting in anticipation for the birth of the Saviour that would bear full punishment for our sins and open up heaven for all people, few were invited to witness the momentous event when it finally happened. Who were the privileged people God in His infinite wisdom had chosen to be the human witnesses of His Son's Incarnation – born as a baby into the human world? Not the elite of the Jewish religious society – no high priests, or distinguished Jewish elders. Why the simple shepherds? They believed without difficulty, they spread the Good News with spontaneity, carrying out God's will with ease and simplicity. God made no mistake in choosing the poor shepherds to be His witnesses of His Son's birth.

To be simple is to have pure intentions. When my spoken words and external actions do not match my inner thoughts and intentions, my heart is not simple. When I have something to hide in what I say or do for a reason other than love, my heart is lacking in simplicity. A simple heart is a sincere heart with pure intentions. Do I have a tendency for flattery, empty talk? The root meaning of the word simplicity is without folds. One can hide a lot of things in the folds of one's garment, but also in the folds of one's speech, or in the folds of one's behaviour. Jesus roundly condemned the Pharisees for their lack of sincerity. He warns us not to be like them (cf. Matthew 5:20). To the Pharisees, human opinion is more important than what God thinks about them. Do I care too much about what other people think of me?

To be simple is to have an undivided heart for God. Clutter is a sign of lack of simplicity. Simplicity in outward things is the sign of interior simplicity. Conversely, if we want to be simple inwardly, we can begin by simplifying things outwardly. Do I, in my life style, have many interests that have no reference to my sanctification or that of others, that are competing with my energy and time for God? Am I simple-hearted enough to obey God's commandment to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength? *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).* If my treasure is not in the Lord alone, my heart will be divided by many competing lesser loves. *My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).* Am I in touch with my innermost self?

To be simple is to have holy humility and an inner disposition that is ready to embrace the truth. Nathanael (St. Bartholomew) had the prized virtue of simplicity. Jesus called him "a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false" (cf. John 1:47). Nathanael had no hidden agenda. What came out of his mouth was what he held in his heart. Jesus said to Nathanael, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Seeing him open to the truth, Christ taught Nathanael that He comes to re-open communication between heaven and earth, to re-establish the ladder which Jacob saw in a dream (cf. Gen 28:12-15). The Body of Christ, offered and received in Holy Mass, is the ladder upon which the angels of God ascend and descend. The Body of Christ, offered up to God the Father as atonement for all sins, is the bridge spanning earth and heaven. This is the mystery hidden from those who strategize but revealed to the simple such as Nathanael (cf. Matthew 11:25).

To be simple in faith is to be led by the Truth even when I do not have full understanding of it. The divine truths of the teachings of Christ remain unchanged whether or not I understand it or like it. In an act of faith I mentally assent to all the teachings of Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Cf. John 14:6) and make them the principles and foundation of my life. Rejecting some difficult teachings, will be disastrous for my soul. *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).* The teachings of Christ have only one objective: it is to keep me on the true path leading me to my eternal destiny with God.

Conversation with Jesus

Precious Lord, You said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Let me come before You in my nothingness, always remembering that even my next breath is dependent on Your grace. Cast out from me anything that does not come from You. Humble my spirit. I desire to have a simple heart that is only governed by holy love. Thus, may my heart be open to all the graces You want to give me so that I can be Your instrument of victory over evil in my little world. Give me a fuller measure of the Holy Spirit and Your zeal and passion for God's Kingdom. Mary, Protectress of the Faith, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus. www.twohearts.hk