



Advent Sunday, 18/12/22.

**Preacher: Fr. Guillermo Méndez Rodríguez, OP
(Friar of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, Vicariate of Venezuela)**

Fourth Biblical Readings:

First reading: Is. 7:10 - 14.

Psalm: 23

Second reading: Rom. 1 - 10

Gospel: Mt. 1, 18 - 24

Advent is a liturgical season that calls us to Christian hope, trusting in the promise of the Most High to come to us soon to bring us salvation. But how difficult it is to preach about hope to the people of Burma, since for too long the former Myanmar has been mired in ethnic conflicts, military dictatorships, socialism, civil war, coups, protests and political prisoners, torture, killings, violence, displacement, fear, denial of human rights.

Nevertheless, I am compelled to speak with God and of God from what I know about this mission land, where the Lord has always been present. I will spend a few minutes on this. Now, I suppose you are wondering, what do I (a Venezuelan) know about Burma? What is my memory of that place? What I know and recognize from Myanmar is my friends who were born there.

For about a year I shared community, study, apostolate, and prayer with young people from Myanmar, some of them now friar priests (like me), who were eager to live the faith ardently and make it known to their people, who wanted to share with others in their land what they had been able to achieve freely, through contemplation and ecclesial life. That is my memory of Burma and in it I recognize a call to hope, lived (in the midst of laughter and tears, soccer and music, human successes, and defects), but always cultivated in a Christian way, by those whom I call and are certainly my professional brothers in Santo Domingo.

To them, and with them to all the people of Burma, I remind you that we have heard in this time of Advent how the prophet Isaiah has invited us to draw near to God and to walk in the light of the Lord, being strong and without fear, because He will fulfill His promise and guide us to His holy dwelling place. Let us therefore rejoice.

For his part, the apostle to the Gentiles has asked us to wake up and take up the weapons of light, to stand firm because the coming of the Lord is near, as James points out in his epistle. So be of good cheer.

So, we must be alert, we must be ready, in Myanmar or in Venezuela, in Rome or in Hong Kong, because when we least expect it, the Son of man will come and will bring us salvation. God himself has invited us to stand firm in our hope and to accept the Baptist's call, the voice crying in the wilderness, to conversion, thus preparing the way for Christ. The Lord promises that he will come soon and lodge in our hearts, that he will pitch his tent in our midst. If we believe it and, therefore, live it, this presence of God with us will make a difference and will bring about changes that will aim at the common good and a more just society. This is a real sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God in our midst.

Today, December 18, one week away from the great Solemnity, we move into the second part of Advent, where we are invited, in particular, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus in the Bethlehem Portal. So, let us get down to work. Firm in hope.

We know that God hears the cry of his people and sends his only begotten Son into the world, thus the Son of God enters history, becoming incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, the ever-virgin, who was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth. We know that God's plan is revealed through the incarnated Word, and we can see that this plan of salvation opens a space for the participation of Mary and Joseph in it; it also opens a space for you and me, for the people of Myanmar and for my dear Venezuela.

We know that through Our Lady's YES, through Mary's fiat, the way to salvation is open to us. Good. Well, now let us see the answer of the carpenter of Nazareth. In his response we will see his faith and in whom Joseph places his hope. We know that Mary's husband was a righteous man who desired to be in tune with God and who put his whole heart, mind, and soul into it.

But the Lord wanted something more. Beyond his plans or his good intentions, the Lord sent his Angel so that Joseph of Nazareth would awaken to God's Plan and would not hesitate to take the Virgin Mother and the Child with him. In this way, the carpenter embraces the plan of salvation and obeys the command of the Most High.

We notice how to achieve the Plan of Salvation we must awaken and walk in the light of the Lord, obeying his Word and configuring ourselves with his Plan, working in harmony with the Will of God. This requires leaving behind our projects and betting on a better Plan, embracing the Wisdom of the Most High, acting on the terms of the Most High. With this, a different dignity is achieved, which arises from being in tune with what God wants, which arises from collaborating with Him freely and voluntarily. To achieve all this, it is necessary to listen and convert ourselves to the One who wants to be God with us.

Therefore, God sends us angels so that we also awaken to the Plan of salvation and cling to it, promoting it with Christian charity. Angels who not only promote spiritual but also corporal works of mercy. Thus, the Dominican family in Myanmar does its best to bring

the Good News, founding convents, teaching the Sacred Doctrine, collaborating in parishes and promoting inculturated pastoral proposals for the salvation of souls, and helping with humanitarian assistance to the most needy with what God has provided, in donations of food and medicine, giving shelter to displaced families and caring for the sick and victims of COVID 19, taking care of the education of many who do not have access to schools or educational centers (face-to-face or online) and also health, rebuilding homes, helping victims of violence.

The Psalmist tells us: I have waited, I have waited for the Lord, and He has bowed down to me, He has heard my cry, He has brought me up from the pit of death. God hears the cry of his people and sends his only begotten Son into the world; thus, the Son of God enters history, incarnating himself through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of Mary, the ever-virgin, who was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth.

We know that God's plan is revealed through the incarnate Word, and it is noticeable that this plan of salvation opens space for the participation of Mary and Joseph in it; it also opens a space for you and me and for the people of Myanmar.

God bless you.

Fr. Guillermo Mendez, OP