

HOMILY: PRESENTATION OF THE BVM, 21 November 2014

Zc 2:14-27; Mt 12:46-50

Homily

Dearest brothers and sisters,

My own personal memory is inevitably linked to Jerusalem, seeing that I was given the privilege of spending three years of my life there. So I can't help remembering today that the memorial we are celebrating, of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is linked to the dedication of the Nea Ekklesia of the Theotokos. This was a huge church in honour of Our Lady built in Jerusalem quite close to the Temple, and consecrated in the year 543. The church no longer exists, but the feast does, celebrating Mary's dedication of herself to God from her infancy.

But let me begin with the first lines of our first reading: **"Rejoice, daughter of Sion, for I am coming to dwell in your midst."** God addresses these words to Israel. He addresses them to Mary, daughter Sion. He addresses them today to me, or better, to us, the new Israel. We are called to sing and rejoice, because he has renewed his choice of us once again, we are his chosen ones, his elect, his Ekklesia, his church.

This is wonderful, but it can also become a terrible problem, as we can see in the conflict that is increasingly coming into the open, with renewed acts of violence in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land. Underlying the violence that characterizes the Holy Land in the last few years is a hermeneutical choice, a particular way of interpreting election and the gift of the Land.

The hermeneutical choice of Jesus is quite different. God's choice of us, his election, is certainly something to be celebrated, but it does not end with celebration. It is also a task, a mission, a responsibility. For with it comes the commitment to fraternity, to the new Family of God that knows no boundaries. Our first reading from the OT is itself quite significant: **"And on that day many nations will be converted to the Lord. They will become his people, and they will live among you."**

This is an ongoing challenge to each one of us and to every group: to rejoice in particularity without closing up to universality. To be proud to be Jew or Greek, or Korean or Indian or Italian, without forgetting the deep fraternity that binds us as children of one God and Father. Yesterday, the dialectic between nationalism and being Salesian and Christian emerged several times during our talks. I cannot help remembering also the wonderful testimony of the Ordinaries of the Holy Land, inviting us to pray not only for persecuted Christians but for all people who are suffering in the Middle East. We have to continually make the journey from a certain tribal mentality to the true universality that is so profoundly Christian. During this congress, in little ways we will have occasion to reach out across our timid personal boundaries, our all-too-human natural group boundaries, and to touch other persons as brothers and sisters, children of one Father. The gospel of today is a powerful restatement of this reality. **"Who are my mother, my brothers, my sisters? Those who do the will of my heavenly Father."** Jesus comes to inaugurate, or rather to proclaim what has always been true: that we are, in all our glorious particularity, one Family, the Family of God.

And what does all this have to do with the Presentation of Our Lady? In the feast of today, we celebrate Mary's total Yes to the Father, to the designs of the Father for her. This yes was born in her from the very beginning of her immaculate existence. But it was also a yes that was renewed afresh every day, so that every moment of her

existence was a Eucharist, a sacrifice of obedience, a holocaust, an offering. And this her consecration is intimately linked to the mission of Jesus, **“to gather into one the scattered children of God.”** (Jn 11:52) Not for nothing is the disciple entrusted to her at the foot of the Cross. Not for nothing did the Vatican Council decide to insert the mystery of Mary right where it belongs: within the mystery of the Church.

So today we rejoice and are glad for the wonders God worked in Mary, and that he works also in us. We make a renewed offering of our hearts to God. And we ask for a fresh outpouring of the *grace of unity*, that we might be able to love God and our brothers and sisters, in our communities, in our Salesian Family, and in the young, **“in a single movement of love,”** as the Salesian Constitutions say in art. 3.