



Dear Jesus Youth Family,

Yet another Advent Season at our portal! A beautiful time for us to delve into an inward journey to see how God works within us. The 'Year of Faith' has concluded, and the spot light of the Church is on Family. Pope Francis has already announced a Vatican Synod on 'The Pastoral Challenges for the Family in the Context of Evangelization' from 5 to 19 October 2014. According to Vatican sources, "the social and spiritual crisis of today's world has an impact on family life and creates a situation of genuine pastoral urgency, which justifies the convocation of an Extraordinary General Assembly". The Gospel readings of the Advent Season highlight the crisis situation of two significant families: namely, that of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and of Joseph and Mary. We should reflect here how God worked with Zechariah and Elizabeth in the crisis situation of their family surrounding the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-20).

What is noteworthy about this family is that both Zechariah and Elizabeth had a remarkable family background. Moreover, *both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord* (v. 6). Yet their family had to go through a deep crisis. And how were they able to come out of such a situation?

God worked through their pain: God worked through the pain of childlessness (v.7). God also works through our pain. What are some of the current pains/sorrows of mine, my family...? Pain gets our attention; it softens us; it humbles us. Can I see God working through my pains?

**God worked through their prayers:** The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his prayers had been heard (v.13). When we pray, we admit that we are not self-sufficient. Anything you are not praying about, you are trying to accomplish through your own wisdom and strength. Can I pause and identify some areas of this sort in my life, in the life of my family?

**God worked through His Holy Spirit:** John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (v. 15). God's Spirit would use John to bring many people back to the Lord and prepare the world for the entry of the Son of God. John's entire role would be accomplished through the power of the Spirit of God.

God works today much the same way. His Holy Spirit inhabits in the human spirits. If God's Spirit was indispensable to John's life and ministry, then it is also indispensable to our lives and ministries. Do you allow the Spirit of God to work within you?

**God worked through faith:** As awesome as this experience was, Zechariah asked: *"How can I be sure of this? I am old and Elizabeth is getting on in years"*(v.18). Zechariah did not have the faith to believe in God's words. Gabriel told him that he would not be able to say a word until all of this would be accomplished. When Elizabeth gave birth to a son, Zechariah believed! God wanted Zechariah to have faith - but even in his unbelief, God worked and demonstrated his power to Zechariah. And Zechariah and Elizabeth could both rejoice in God's plan for their lives. Can I recall moments and situations in my life where I lacked faith in God's words and promises, yet God remained faithful to answer my prayers?

As we go through our Advent reflections this year, let us rejoice in God's work - using our pain to bring us closer to Him, honouring our prayers of dependence, empowering us by His Holy Spirit, and building up and deepening our faith.

Let this Advent be, as Thomas Merton advises, "the beginning of the end in us, of all that is not Christ".

Wishing each and everyone a very fruitful Season of  
Advent and a Christ-filled Christmas!

**Fr. Bitaju Puthenpurackal O.S.S.T.**

Spiritual Director, Jesus Youth International

