

REFLECTION

We are entering into the blessed season of Christmas. What had been said by the angels to the poor shepherds on the first Christmas Day is true even today: "Do not be afraid! I have good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior is born - Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-11).

According to the Gospel of Luke, the season of good tidings starts with the apparition of Angel Gabriel to Zacharias - the father of John the Baptist, and to Mary - the mother of Jesus. Zacharias was afraid on seeing the angel while Mary was troubled on hearing the angel. The angel clearly told both of them: "Do not be afraid" (Lk. 1.12, 29). The angels assured the shepherds too with the same words: "Do not be afraid" (Lk. 2:10). The password to open the magical box of the mystery of Christmas is this announcement of the angels: "Do not be afraid".

We are living in a world of comforts and conveniences. But still we are totally upset and afraid; troubled by anxieties, fear and fatigue. Despite possessing luxuries and comforts of the present world, people are dissatisfied, depressed and discontented. **Why are we afraid?**

In Biblical history, for the first time a reference to the term "afraid" is found in the book of Genesis. After the sin of the first parents, they hid themselves among the trees. But the Lord God called out to Adam, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard you; I was afraid and hid from you because I was naked" (Gen. 3:10).

Sin distances man from God. The anxiety and unhappiness experienced by man is the result of being away from God. St. Francis of Assisi defined 'sin' as 'being away from God, having everything except God.' The predominant alphabet of 'SIN' is the attitude of 'I' being in the center instead of God.

As Adam covered up his nakedness with leaves, the present man also creates an artificial environment to 'hide' himself from the presence of God. All the bodily pleasures and worldly luxuries of the modern man are the additional clothing he uses to cover up the emptiness of his soul and his sinful nakedness. The conversion of St. Francis of Assisi begins by shedding of all bodily pleasures and worldly luxuries to become 'naked'.

At Christmas, God comes down to be with each one of us. The pedagogy of Christmas is "kenosis" which means self-emptying. The methodology to reach Christmas according to St. Paul is the shedding of EGO and 'maturing' oneself with the same attitude of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5).

It is with this spirituality that St. Francis of Assisi designed the first Christmas Crib in Greccio, Italy. He took 25 days to prepare the Crib. And he believed that each and every pain he took to build the Crib was a sign of removing his ego and preparing his heart with the right disposition for the coming of the Lord.

Christmas is not merely an external celebration but rather as St. Clement of Alexandria said, "It is a feast of CHRISTIFICATION and CHRISTOPHERSHIP" i.e. 'becoming Christ-like' and 'carrying Christ' in all the walks of life as Mary carried Jesus.

As the angels whisper in our hearts again, 'Do not be afraid', let us confront our fears to throw away the garments of sensuality and worldliness, muster courage to come like the shepherds to the Little Babe with all our fears and allow His gentle and holy gaze to melt our egos. Thus, we give Him room to be born in our hearts. And when Christ is born in our hearts, we become Christmas, bringing great joy to all the people.

Wish you all Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Mar Raphael Thattil,
Ecclesiastical Advisor to Jesus Youth International

SAINT'S QUOTE

"There is no place for selfishness - and no place for fear! Do not be afraid, then, when love demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice." - St. John Paul II

TO DO

With the faith that rises by contemplating the Love of Bethlehem, can we speak gently and firmly to all the fears that rises in our hearts? Also, try to bring the good news of Jesus to a few persons who are in some forms of fear.

DO NOT BE AFRAID
I BRING YOU

Good News

THAT WILL CAUSE
GREAT JOY
FOR ALL THE PEOPLE

LUKE 2:10

