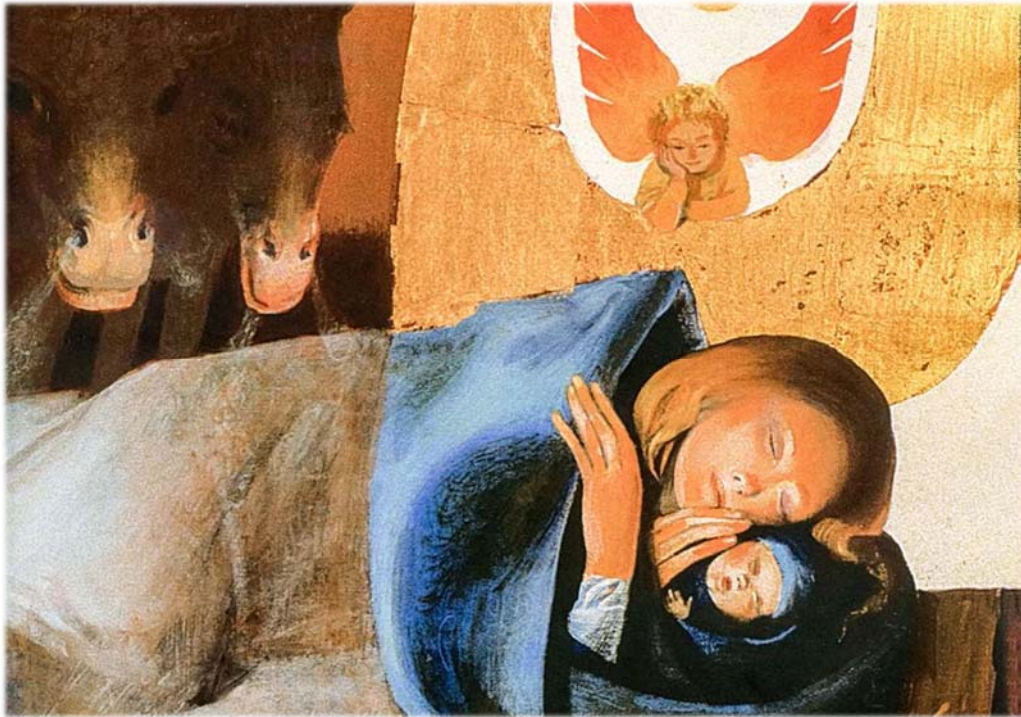


Because of the tender mercy of our God...

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Superior General

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Nativity (detail) - Arcabas

"...the daybreak from on high will visit us" (Lk 1:78).

The hymns of the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, which we pray every day, proclaim the mystery of Christmas that we are celebrating these days. God visits us. He is *Emmanuel*.

Both the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* tell us that the action of God is the fruit of his mercy (ελεος): vv. 50, 54, 72, 78. The two point out that this mercy goes back a long way, to our fathers, and continues through time until today. The *Benedictus* adds that the sources of mercy dwell in the entrails (σπλαγχνα) of God ("tender" is the translation in English of this reality coming from the entrails, from the womb). This same root will be used by Luke to indicate the emotion that was experienced by the father in the parable when he sees his youngest son returning (Lk 15:20).

The tender mercy that blossoms in Jesus bears within it all of the strength that the biblical language places on these powerful terms, *hesed* and *rahamin*. **HESED** refers to the aggregate of attitudes and actions that unite those who have established an alliance. HESED is friendship, solidarity, faithfulness, reciprocal trust, loyalty, hospitality, mutual love. HESED is the word of effective communion, that communion which nothing nor no

one can break (*"With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you."* Jer 31:3).

RAHAMIN means "maternal womb". This word shows that the love of God is like that of a mother who bends over the child of her womb to protect it, caress it, care for it (cf. Is 49:15). It is the expression of the tenderness of God, who feels in himself that which happens in the flesh of his sons and daughters.

Tender mercy is not a fleeting feeling but a solid and permanent orientation. It is not only a shuddering of the spirit, but above all, an effective behavior, an active kindness that translates into actions: *"The Mighty One has done great things... he has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly... He has raised up a horn for our salvation... salvation from our enemies ... visits his people"*.

Christmas is a mystery of mercy and, therefore of action. The mercy, of which so many of us continue speaking about in this jubilee year, cannot be reduced to an emotional outburst that is as strong as it is fleeting. Feelings can easily be manipulated. This is something that is well known by advertisers, whether they want to raise funds for a humanitarian cause or if they set out to encourage consumption by exploiting family nostalgia or fear of loneliness.

Mercy is not emotion but **sensibility**. Sensibility is a constant orientation of the spirit along a determined line of behavior. If my sensibility is geared towards those who suffer injustice, or toward the poor, or toward my brothers in community ... others will know that they can rely on me to support actions that sustain and promote the good of these persons. Always. Whatever may happen. Whatever I feel. The same thing happens with directing our lives toward God and with the commitment to prayer.

Sensibility is fed, is patiently built up, and gradually embedded in the deep structure of personality. Mercy is not improvised. In order to be true and persistent in action, it must come from afar, from the depth of our being.

The tender mercy of God is his very being. Our foundation, said the Good Father, is the consecration to **the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary**. Are not hearts and entrails the same thing? The tender mercy of our God is also our charism. The horizon toward which we journey is the faithfulness of a brother, Jesus, who walks with us without ever leaving us; and the tenderness of a mother, Mary, who suffers in her flesh, the wound that pierced the body of her son.

Happy New Year!