



## **ADVENT 2018**

# **A CLOSER LOOK**

*Journeying with Josefa Segovia*

## **INTRODUCTION**

With Advent we start the New Year of the Church, a season of new beginnings and new hopes. This year we want to pray in the company of Josefa Segovia, a woman who inspired those near her to dare taking risks in the service of God.

I was fortunate to experience it first hand when in 1955 she called me to cross the Atlantic and come to the United States in the company of another young student. What excitement it was to come to a new country, a new culture, to new opportunities! But what was she expecting from us in such a big place? In her words: "to be my eyes and my ears" in order to discern if God would want in the future the presence of the TA there.

Josefa's serene gaze, her trust in God and her confidence in youth, her ability to look at new circumstances with prudence and without fear, helped us to face any difficulties and enjoy the adventure.

What will she tell us today, among the challenges of the present? I can hear her voice reminding us lovingly that it is worth risking our lives in the service of God's people. "Don't be afraid. The Lord will illumine the path." (Ma. Dolores Gracián)

### **FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, December 2nd**

***When all around us we see injustice and despair,  
we turn our eyes and root our hope in the Lord.***

#### **JER 33:14-16**

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah.

In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot;

He shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The LORD our justice."

## **JOSEFA SEGOVIA**

Blessed is anyone who trusts in the Lord, says Jeremiah. Its foliage stays green untroubled in year of drought, it never stops bearing fruit (Jer. 17:7-8). The virtue of those who are filled with hope, those who can do everything in Him who comforts them, must surely be as the tree leaves that bloom by the book: soft, smooth, abundant, so as to provide shade to those that pass by, fatigued and exhausted from the burning sun of passions. How can they feel suffocated when the blessed sap of hope is nourishing them? How can they be fruitless if, being impotent and nothing, they hold in their hands the blessed fruit of redemption, that is, the most precious blood of Christ?

... The name of Jesus became our hope. Because of it, the history of the Jewish people can be summarized into that habitual and uninterrupted longing. The patriarchs, the prophets, all clamor: Jesus. David tells the Lord: "May his name be blessed forever. The people with Isaiah, with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, share this hope... This hope is not limited to the people of Israel: it goes beyond the mountains and seas, and extends itself through Europe and through the entire world.

However, hope in Jesus did not cease with his coming, his death, resurrection and ascension. Today, as then, everything becomes hope in Jesus; humanity is lost without Jesus and life comes to us through him. If Jesus is savior and health for all, where should our hope rest? We know from experience that hope in Jesus supports us, that without that hope we would not be capable of anything, and that in Jesus we find salvation and life. What, through God's mercy, we know and confess should be known and confessed by the whole world, so that health would reach all and the entire humanity would reap the fruits that come from the blessed name.

### **For reflection**

- When I look around me, do I see more reasons for despair than for hope?
- Where do I root my hope?
- How and in what moments have my hopes been fulfilled?
- How can I give hope to others during this Advent? What concrete actions can I do for my family, my coworkers, the people around me?

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, in you are all the promises of God fulfilled. You are the hope of all humanity. When the situation around us would invite us to despair, help us to look at our lives, our world, our own situation with the eyes of a hope that knows it won't be disappointed. Amen.*

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, December 9, 2018

***We may experience obstacles, turns, peaks and valleys in our ways, and some are of our own making, hindering the coming of the Lord to our own lives and our own world. We are invited today to open up those ways for the full coming of the Lord.***

### **LUKE 3:1-6**

John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the desert:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.

Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

### **JOSEFA SEGOVIA**

May the norm of your conduct always be that which shone in Saint John and which until now also shines splendidly in your own conduct; do not hold people back, but guide them towards God as the goal. When the disciples approached the Precursor, he would always point them towards the Master. Our mission is to prepare, show the way, form a perfect people; and perfect is what follows its own course, the course established by God, the channel of grace for us.

Who was John? A voice of one that cries in the desert (Jn 1:23). The voice can be heard, it can be perceived, but it is not something concrete that can be touched. The voice shows the way, but it is itself not the way.

Be always voice; a voice that is clear, precise, harmonious, well modulated, free of screeching or harsh tones; a voice that signals a duty, that teaches a lesson; a voice that does not stop, but keeps sounding so that others may know the way to be followed. It is not the way; it just points to it.

### **For Reflection**

- How often do I allow God’s voice to pierce through my difficulties and comforts, my decisions and hesitations, my fears and trust?
- What keeps me from being that courageous voice at times when to be silent and un-involved is the much easier path?
- How open and receptive am I to the teaching moments that God offers?
- How do I become the messenger and the message of the ever-present Living God, and the yet-to-come Christ, in my daily living?

## **Prayer**

*Lord you mark the path that leads to new life and belonging, We pray for the grace of perseverance for all those who begin earnestly the journey of faith and fall along when trials meet them on the way. but may we not forget that your hand reaches out and guides us through the darkest and brightest moments of life.*

## **THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, December 16, 2018**

***It is not ourselves that we announce when we do good works, but the Good News of the one who is coming to us.***

### **LUKE 3:3-18**

Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.

John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

### **JOSEFA SEGOVIA**

It was more with his example than with his words that Saint John prepared the way. His entire life was oriented towards Jesus; better said, he had no other life than the life of Jesus. When the disciples wanted to acclaim him, he directed them to Jesus. He attracted followers to guide them to Jesus. He felt unworthy to tie up Jesus' sandals. This is deep humility, necessary and convenient for everyone, but indispensable to the precursor of Christ.

John, inspired from heaven, spoke that very profound statement: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). This beautiful expression condenses the origin and the redeeming mission of the divine Word. Learn from St. John, with his austerity and humility, to conform to the name of precursors in this apostolic work.

### **For reflection**

- When I strive to be good, do I expect people to recognize me, or Jesus, in my good works?
- How passionate am I to bring people closer to Christ? How do I actively show it?
- What are the sins of the world that are more painful to me at this moment?
- As I contemplate the sins of the world and my own, how insistent and persevering is my prayer for the coming of the Lamb of God?

## Prayer

*Lord, wars, injustices, the plight of migrants at our borders, are some of the sins of the world that we contemplate in horror and pain. We also look inside and see our own sin, our refusal to give of ourselves, our internal conflict and violence, our closing of our own borders to others, and we claim, once and again: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us! Give us peace!*

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, December 23, 2018

***We listen with the ears of our hearts  
as circumstances of need surround us  
and the life of God in us prompts us to go out and serve.***

### LUKE 1:39-45

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.

Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

### JOSEFA SEGOVIA

From the Gospel narrative, we immediately draw another lesson: Mary went as quickly as she could. Which means that, when it entails doing something good for people, to cheer our brothers and sisters up, sharing with them the good news in the Lord's name, it is necessary to act as our Mother: without delay. This means that diligence is a human virtue that combines well with the theological virtues and we must practice it if we want to be ready for the Lord's service.

Charity made Mary speed up through the mountains of Judea to reach her holy cousin's home. This is a challenge to the poor quality of our own charity that, sometimes instead of with diligence, acts under the weight of our own selfishness, of so many human considerations, the innumerable miseries that keep us from carrying out the divine mandate.

As soon as she conceived the Son of God, by the grace and power of the

Holy Spirit, she went in haste to her cousin. It was not only to congratulate and perform for her the actions of charity dictated by love, but also, and most importantly to have the divine Son she carried sanctify John the Baptist. For, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy, Elizabeth told her.

Let us not be selfish. As soon as we receive God through grace, let us not keep that treasure to ourselves. Let us go without delay to those who are thirsting for God and waiting for open hearts to surrender themselves to him.

## **For Reflection**

- How willing am I to let God use me as an instrument of service and nearness to someone at a time, and for the duration of His choosing? What fears do I have about this?
- What are my attitudes when I receive help from others? Do I regard this as humiliating and intrusive, superfluous and unnecessary? Or do I appreciate with gratitude and humility the spontaneous deeds of kindness and support without suspicion and prejudgments?
- Name the people in your life that you turn to in time of need. Express your gratitude to them during this Advent-waiting.
- What might I do to make vital in my life, a transforming and growing relationship with Mary, one that potentiates an active concern for the welfare of others?

## **Prayer**

*Lord of peace and love, you show us through Mary that loving one another is done in the things we do, the time we spend, the concern we have, the hardships that we bear, the joy that we share and the prayer-song (Magnificat) that we sing. "The Lord has great things for us, we are filled with gladness and joy." Amen.*