

## **The Potter and the Clay**

First Sunday of Advent (B) - Is 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7 / 1 Cor 1:3-9 / Mk 13:33-37

Ave Maria Catholic Church, December 3, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

*(Rite of Acceptance of Catechumens and Candidates)*

Today, we welcome those who will be baptized and those who will be received in full communion with the Church at the Easter Vigil. You have heard God's call, you have welcomed his voice, and you have begun your preparation for this your encounter with Christ and his Church.

This is not only your journey but also our journey as a parish community. This is the central message of Advent. God keeps calling us. Christ must be welcomed again and again. Our encounter with Christ and his Church requires constant acceptance, formation, and defense. This leads us to three questions:

### **First question: What do we need to accept?**

The prophet Isaiah speaks to us in the first reading of this Sunday's liturgy. He describes our relationship with God with these words: "*You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever,*" (Isaiah 63:16).

This is the first truth we must accept: God is our Father. We are the work of his hands. The prophet Jeremiah teaches: "*Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel,*" (Jeremiah 18: 6). The prophet Jeremiah uses the image of the craftsman who "fashions" and molds his artistic creation and applies this image to God's work in our lives.

This is precisely the description of the creation of man in the Book of Genesis: "*The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground,*" (Gn 2: 7). Later, Job will remember this origin and exalt over God's work in his life: "*Your hands have formed me and fashioned me . . . Remember that you fashioned me from clay!*" (Job 10: 8-11).

We must accept our origin and proclaim with the prophet Isaiah: "*O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands,*" (Isaiah 64:8).

How humbling it is to recognize ourselves as clay! How humbling it is to proclaim that we are fashioned and made! How humbling it is to accept that we are not our own makers and that we are dependent on someone else!

There is a Creator who made us. In a most intelligent way, He planned our existence. In a most powerful way, He forms us; in a most loving way, He sustains us in our being. In our first encounter with God, we must accept what is evident: *God, Our Lord, is our Father, and we are the work of his hands.*

**Our second question: If we are the work of God's hands, do we accept to be formed?**

Let us return to the image of the clay. Why would a craftsman use clay? What could be conceived as the virtue present in clay that other elements do not have? Clay does not offer resistance to the potter's hands. With the gentle direction of the potter's hands, clay is molded according to the beautiful plan of the craftsman.

If we accept God as our creator, why do we resist his work? He made us; we belong to Him. We must also allow ourselves to be formed according to his plan. However, being clay is a humbling experience! Why should we allow anyone else to shape our lives?

Our desire to form ourselves according to our own liking is a constant temptation. We want to be the artisans of our lives. We want to dictate what we are, what we have, what we do, and what we must achieve.

However, when we deny God's action as the Craftsman of our lives and place ourselves as the only source of our formation, frustration comes. We are buffeted by our changing desires.

Today, we want to be one thing, and tomorrow, we want to be something different. Today, we want to possess something; tomorrow, we do not wish to have it. Today, we have some goals, and tomorrow, we have entirely different ones.

This happens when we forget that we are clay and God is the Artist who wants to accomplish his beautiful work in us. When we pray, do we ask to do God's will? How many times do we ask with all honesty: Lord, what do you want me to be? Lord, what do you want me to do? To be just as God wants us to be and to do what God wants us to do is our joy and fulfillment.

Now, let us remember that the prophet Isaiah announces that God is not only our Father but also our Redeemer. Then, for our redemption, God decreed the Incarnation of His only Son, the birth of Jesus, and His passion and death on the cross. Then, the cross becomes an instrument of formation.

Like clay that is shaped with a tool, our lives are shaped with the cross. When we encounter struggles and difficulties, we must remember that we are shaped, formed, and built. That cross, that difficulty, that sacrifice, is not an instrument of destruction but the tool Christ chose to form our lives.

**Final question: if we are the work of God's hands, what do we need to defend?**

In the second reading of this Sunday's liturgy, the Apostle Paul proclaims: *"I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way,"* (1 Cor 1: 4-5).

In Christ, we have been enriched in every way. Jesus brought us peace, joy, true love, and righteousness. Jesus brought forgiveness to our past, meaning to our present, and eternal happiness for our future.

We must defend those gifts. They are very valuable. This is why we must be watchful! We must be alert! The gospel tells us that we must be watchful. What does it mean to be watchful? It means to live every day and every moment as an encounter with our Lord Jesus.

Catechumens and Candidates, this is your journey and our journey. We walk towards our encounter with Christ, and our encounter with Christ requires constant acceptance, formation, and defense. May we always run forth to meet Christ, our Lord. Amen.