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Retreat 6 – 08.12.2025

Meditation on Luke 1:26-38

Today's Gospel describes a key point in human history. It is the decisive turning point at which, through the message of the angel, the work of the Holy Spirit and Mary's 'yes' to God's plan of salvation, God not only draws closer to mankind in a way never seen before, but also becomes man himself in his Son. Since this incarnation, the kingdom of God has already dawned in this world itself and literally reverses the rules of dominion that had applied until then. How does Mary express it so aptly in the Magnificat? "He scatters those who are arrogant in heart; he topples the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly. He bestows his gifts on the hungry and sends the rich away empty" (Luke 1:51-53). There is, as it were, a systemic change in the way the world functions, in what can and may be hoped for and expected.

Those affected by sexual abuse in the Church's area of responsibility often expect, hope for and long for such a change. In the church, they have seen and continue to see themselves confronted with an institution in which mechanisms have regularly taken effect and habits have been cultivated that have mostly had a negative impact on them as victims. Members of their parishes do not want to believe them when they report abuse by the local priest because they do not want to burden themselves and their lives of faith with it. Or these parishioners deliberately look the other way, even though they were aware of the abuse, because they do not want to enter into conflict with this priest or with the diocese. Other priests defend their brother who has been accused, without examining the basis of the allegations, because they feel more loyal to each other than to those who allege that they have been abused. Bishops are concerned about their reputation and that of the diocese, so they transfer priests who have been found guilty to other positions, if possible, without much public attention and without sufficient clarification and review of their actions. Sometimes the non-church environment also exploits the knowledge of abuse cases, but not to stand on the side of those affected by abuse and help them to achieve justice, but to blackmail representatives of the church and gain advantages for themselves.

In such a context, people affected by abuse have no chance. Nobody listens to them, nobody wants to help them, and many want nothing to do with them. They are like prisoners of circumstance who have no prospect of being freed from the burden of abuse.

Where can salvation come from here? Where can help come from? Looking at today's Gospel, this question is ultimately answered by the angel and his reference to God's actions. It breaks

into the usual processes in a new way and breaks something open. Afterwards, nothing is as it was before.

Who can be the angel for those affected by abuse? And what must they be like? If we take today's Gospel as our starting point, the first thing that becomes clear is that the angel acts on a commission; he is "sent from God" (Luke 1:26), he fulfils a divine mission. The second thing that stands out is that the angel addresses the one to whom he has been sent in an appreciative manner and in a certain way also emphasises her dignity as a child of God: "O favoured one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). He speaks to her encouragingly: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 1:30) and outlines a hopeful perspective for her child and therefore also for her (Luke 1:31-33). He does not merely issue an instruction; rather, he engages with her questions and uncertainties. When she asks, "How will this be?" (Luke 1:34), the narrative continues that "the angel answered her" (Luke 1:35), indicating that he enters into a genuine dialogue with her. All in all, the angel's behaviour towards Mary, to whom he is sent, can be described with these catchphrases: 'fulfilling a mission', 'appreciating', 'encouraging', 'giving hope', and 'entering into dialogue'.

Isn't this exactly how those who want to get in touch with victims of abuse should approach them? The answer to this question is actually clear when you realise what the individual points mean. Getting in touch with those affected by abuse, exchanging ideas with them and accompanying and supporting them is not an annoying additional special task that is added to the "normal" Christian practice of faith. Rather, it is a core part of following Jesus and continuing his mission. Appreciation in the encounter with those affected is a matter of course once you have understood that this is not about a case to be "dealt with", but about a specific person who is a child of God, my neighbour whom I love as much as I love myself. Encouraging interaction with one another emphasises the insight into the skills, abilities and strengths of those affected, which should be discussed and strengthened. Those affected are not people who are inherently deficient, reduced to their wounds and injuries. Hope is not only a Christian virtue, but also an opportunity to look forward together to possibilities and opportunities while being aware of the past, without eliminating or trivialising the past. The willingness to engage in dialogue implies the recognition of equality in our mutual dealings. Those affected are not merely the recipients of requests, but are partners in the reappraisal and future prevention of cases of abuse; they are the experts of their own lives and the associated experiences, from which those not affected can and should learn.

In today's Gospel, the angel leaves the person to whom he was sent after she has apparently found the right path for herself and accepts it as such. She obviously has clarity in this regard. She no longer needs him. Applied to those who want to be similar to this angel in today's Gospel, who want to support and accompany those affected by abuse, this could mean: firstly,

being reliably and sustainably present as long as it is necessary and desired and, secondly, having a sense of when it is time to withdraw in order to allow those affected to follow their path of self-determination and self-empowerment in dignity. "And the angel departed" (Luke 1:38).

Prayer

Lord our God. Angels are your heavenly messengers. They create a connection between You and us. Let us recognise ways in which we ourselves can become messengers of Your philanthropic love and give us the insight to discern the right signs and words again and again.

Question

On what occasions can I be like the angel in today's Gospel for those affected by abuse?

