With God, I Am Not Alone

I admit that even though my family name is Tapang, a part of my youth revolved around fear! I was afraid to commit mistakes, afraid to be rejected, afraid to be criticized, afraid to say what was in my mind, afraid to be the talk of the town! I was very much insecure and afraid. My tendency was to please people. It became a habit, a lifestyle!

Things gradually changed. I realized that fear, regardless of the source, can immobilize and prevent me from achieving what I desire and am capable of. One thing was sure: fear will always be a part of my life—if not influencing me outright, then at least waiting to take hold of me again. While it is not something that we can immediately turn off, this does not mean we can do nothing about it. I am reminded of the two hidden messages of the word ‘fear’ that I saw in social media: Face Everything And Rise, or Forget Everything And Run. The choice is ours.

Our readings remind us the reality of fear, especially the fear of social disapproval or stigma, particularly in a culture that reduced women’s dignity and importance in society when they are unable to produce offspring. As a matter of fact, there are women mentioned in the Bible who would do everything just to get away from this stigma. Sarai, for example, after years of barrenness, was so anxious to have a child that she offered her maidservant Hagar to her husband. Her reason was “perhaps I will have sons through her” (Gn 16:2). Sarai unwittingly made a rival for herself with regard to Abraham’s affections. Other examples were the sisters Rachel and Leah. Rachel associated the value of motherhood to life itself, begging her husband to “give me children, or I shall die!” (Gn 30:1-4). Like Sarai, Rachel offered her maidservant to bear a child on Rachel’s behalf. On the other hand, Leah expressed her belief that her situation in the family and the love of her husband was conditional upon her bearing children (Gn 29:32). A common fear pitted two sisters against each other rather than unite them in hope and prayer.

The First Reading and the Gospel are additional cases of infertility. Manoah’s wife and Elizabeth also endured emotional and social trouble.

Their problems also affected their respective husbands, Manoah and Zechariah. In a culture where children are like human “trophies,” offspring (especially sons) give pride to the father because they are signs of social security, able to carry on the family legacy. No wonder many husbands, although offensive and improper, may entertain the idea of leaving their wives and looking for other women who could give them a child to be called their own. They dread the possibility that in their old age they will be alone.

Fear is normal. No human being can truthfully say of never having experienced fear. Even Jesus, God-man that he is, came into contact with fear—his experience in garden of Gethsemane and on the crucifixion. What makes us different in facing fear to others is this—we believe we are not alone! We are with the Emmanuel—God is with us!

The announcement of the coming of the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth is a sobering reminder that it is not only fear who is with us. God is also always with us every step of the way, every moment of our lives. Rather than despair over the hovering presence of fear, let us be comforted by the fact of God’s ever-present love.

Fr. Ramil Tapang, SSP
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
[Cf. Heb 10:37]
(Recited when there is no opening song)

He who is to come will come and will not delay, and now there will be no fear within our land, for he is our Savior.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(The priest may address the assembly with these or other similar words)

P — God's messenger announces to Zechariah that the priest will have a son. Zechariah could not bring himself to believe this extraordinary news. The name given to the promised son is “Yohanan” or John, which means “God is gracious.” Indeed, the conception of John the Baptist is a manifestation of God's graciousness which will reach its culmination in the birth of the Messiah. This glimpse of the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord fills us with joy and gladness, for indeed salvation is so close.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)

All — I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, (strike your breast) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. All — Amen.

A reading from the Book of Judges

THERE WAS a certain man from Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children. An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Though you are barren and have had no children, yet you will conceive and bear a son. Now, then, be careful to take no wine or strong drink and to eat nothing unclean. As for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb. It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines.”

The woman went and told her husband, “A man of God came to me; he had the appearance of an angel of God, terrible indeed. I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, ‘You will be with child and will bear a son. So take neither wine nor strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For the boy shall be consecrated to God from the womb, until the day of his death.’”

The woman bore a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up and the Lord blessed him; the Spirit of the Lord stirred him.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 71)

R — Fill me with your praise, and I will sing your glory!

sr. m.c.a. parco, fsp

Fill me with your praise

and I will sing your glory.

First Reading
[Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a] (Sit)

Samson is consecrated to the Lord from his mother's womb. The story of Samson's birth is similar to the Gospel story of the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, a prophet consecrated to the Lord's service.

1. Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress. O my God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked. (R)
2. For you are my hope, O Lord; my trust, O God, from my youth. On you I depend from birth; from my mother’s womb you are my strength. (R)

3. I will treat of the mighty works of the Lord; O God, I will tell of your singular justice. O God, you have taught me from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds. (R)

Alleluia (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. O Root of Jesse’s stem, sign of God’s love for all his people: come to save us without delay! Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Lk 1:5-25)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

IN THE DAYS of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Once when he was serving as priest in his division’s turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.” Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute.

Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.

After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, “So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.

All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Prayer of the Faithful (Stand)

P — The almighty Father’s generosity is immeasurable. In due time, he will grant the aspirations of his people. With confidence, we implore him:

R — Lord, be gracious to us.

C — That the Church, the people of God, imbued by the Holy Spirit, may attain the proper disposition for the birth of the Savior this Christmas, we pray. (R)

C — That our government officials continue to uphold the dignity of every person, exhausting their means to promote peace and seek the well-being of their constituents, we pray: (R)

C — That parents may welcome children with love and responsibility and help them to discover the will of God for them, we pray: (R)

C — That the Lord may bless married couples who, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, long for children to raise and love, we pray: (R)

C — That those who have gone ahead of us may find peace and eternal happiness sharing in the joy of the Master’s table, we pray: (R)

P — Fill us with your Spirit, Lord, so that we may welcome our Savior with joy and gladness and may be true to you now and for ever.

All — Amen.

Presentation of the Gifts

(Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...

All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — Look mercifully, Lord, on the gifts we lay upon your altar and by your power consecrate what we bring to you in our weakness.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

Preface (Advent II)

P — The Lord be with you.

All — And with your spirit.

P — Lift up your hearts.

All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.
For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.
It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.
And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts of Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)
All — Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
(Lk 1:78-79)
The Dawn from on high will visit us, guiding our feet in the way of peace.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gifts you have bestowed. Create in us a desire for blessings yet to come, that we may welcome the birth of Christ our Savior with free and devoted hearts.
We make our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People
P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)
May your family always rejoice together, O God, over the mysteries of redemption they have celebrated, and grant its members the perseverance to attain the effects that flow from them.
Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal
P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.

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