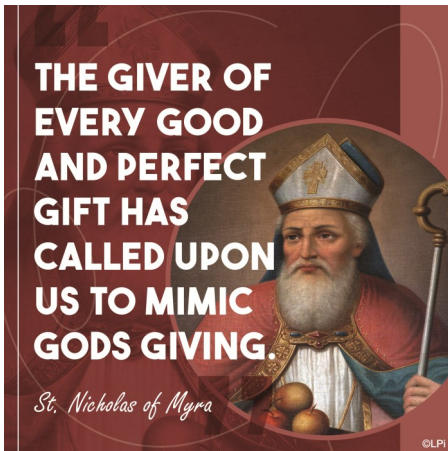


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As Advent begins and the Church prepares our heart for the coming of the Child in the manger, the liturgy offers us on December 6 the radiant figure of St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra - a man who lived the kerygma with such intensity that even centuries later the world still feels the echo of his faith, albeit often in a distorted, commercialized way. Let us not be so interested in the red-suited myth created by advertising; we want to encounter the real Nicholas, the saint who heard the Word of God, allowed it to judge the thoughts and intentions of his heart, and responded with a life totally given over to Christ and to the poor.

Born around the year 270 in Patara (Lycia, present-day Turkey) to wealthy Christian parents, Nicholas was raised in the faith from his earliest years. When an epidemic took both his father and mother, he found himself, still young, the heir to a great fortune. At that moment the Word struck him like a sword: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." Does this Gospel verse expose our attachments, our securities, and our fear of poverty? Nicholas did not negotiate with the Gospel. He did not say, "Lord, I will give 10%, or 50%, or what is left over." He liquidated everything and distributed it to those in need. This was his first great Pasch: he died to the old man tied to riches and rose to a new life in radical trust in Providence.

The most famous episode of his life - the secret gift of three bags of gold to save three young women from prostitution - was not an isolated act of kindness. It flowed from a heart already crucified with Christ. Night after night he prayed, fasted, and listened to the cry of the poor, because he had learned in prayer that the poor are the true presence of Jesus. He did not want glory; he threw the gold through the window and disappeared into the darkness, teaching us that authentic charity is always hidden, silent, and free, never seeking recognition or gratitude. Have we experienced this same mystery? A brother who loses his job and suddenly finds an envelope with money under the door; a family in crisis that receives help without ever knowing from whom it came. This is the charity of St. Nicholas alive among us, the charity that is born from the Eucharist and from the Word of God.

But Nicholas was not only a man of charity; he was a man of truth, a defender of the faith to the point of martyrdom (though he did not die a martyr, he suffered imprisonment and exile under Diocletian). Tradition tells us that at the Council of Nicaea in 325, when the heretic Arius denied the full divinity of Christ, Nicholas could not contain the fire of the Holy Spirit. In a moment of holy impatience he rose and struck Arius - an act that scandalized the assembly and led to his temporary arrest. In an age when the divinity of Jesus is once again denied - sometimes subtly in our own hearts when we prefer a comfortable Christianity without the cross - Nicholas reminds us that the faith is worth fighting for, even at the cost of misunderstanding or persecution. The same Spirit who made Peter and John say, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard," burned in the heart of Nicholas.

As we pass through the Red Sea of our own history and allow the Lord to heal our wounds, St. Nicholas walks with us. He is a father who teaches us three essential attitudes for every disciple. Detachment from material goods, because only the poor in spirit can receive the Kingdom. Hidden charity that expects nothing in return, because love is credible only when it is free. Courageous defense of the faith, because a Church that is silent in the face of error betrays the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

This year, let us celebrate December 6 concretely. Gather the family, light the Advent wreath, and tell the children the true story of St. Nicholas - not the Coca-Cola version, but the story of a bishop who gave everything because he had first received everything from Christ. And do not forget the missionary dimension. St. Nicholas is the patron of children because he defended their dignity. In a world that discards the weak, let us announce that every child is wanted by God, that poverty is not a condemnation but an opportunity for Providence to manifest itself. May St. Nicholas, bishop and confessor, obtain for us the grace to live this Advent with a poor, generous, and courageous heart. May he help us prepare a manger in our souls where the Child Jesus will truly find room.

Peace,