

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

“Bethlehem and the Cross” (Regnum Christi Meditation for Saturday of the Second Week of Advent by Father Walter Schu, LC - Matthew 17:9a, 10-13– [Audio version*](#))

As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” He said in reply, “Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also, will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Introductory Prayer: Lord, your disciples sincerely tried to comprehend your identity and believe in you. I come before you today with my doubts and problems, hoping to find in this prayer an answer to my deepest aspirations. I want to believe with unwavering faith, and I want to love you with a devout heart. I offer you this time of prayer as my token of gratitude for all I have received from you.

Petition: Mary, help me to embrace God’s will in my life, just as Christ embraced the Father’s plan for our salvation.

1. **John the Baptist as Elijah:** Once again the Gospel refers to John the Baptist as the one whose role is to prepare us for the One who is to come. Through the prophet Malachi, the Jews’ expectation of the return of Elijah, who will prepare the way for the promised Messiah, has grown. But they have come to view him as a figure of great power, someone who will sweep men away. So, they fail to recognize Elijah’s presence in the person of John the Baptist, whose only power is that of the Spirit of God, calling all people to conversion of heart in order to receive the Christ. How many times in my life do I fail to recognize the presence of Christ in my life because I’m seeking something other than Christ’s promises to his followers? Christ doesn’t offer an easy path of comfort and consolations.
2. **Bethlehem and the Cross:** Why did Christ become a helpless baby at Bethlehem? Why did he take on a fragile human body? Precisely so he could suffer for us in order to redeem us. What does that mean for our lives as Christians? It means nothing less than the fact that suffering is a gift from God. It is the Father’s gentle caress, molding us into the image of his Son. The cross is the source of our fruitfulness, not only in

our personal spiritual growth, but also in the mission to win graces for others, for all of the souls God has mysteriously entrusted to our care.

3. **Obedience unto Death:** Christ's desire to embrace suffering rose from his loving obedience to his Father's plan, without condition or limit. This loving obedience is what gives suffering its redemptive value. From the moment of his birth at Bethlehem, Christ shows us what it means to obey with love. Bethlehem is a school of obedience. In Bethlehem, Christ teaches us that only a loving obedience frees, only loving obedience redeems and sanctifies, only loving obedience enriches. Loving obedience alone saves, loving obedience alone frees us from sin and loving obedience alone pleases God. Let us embrace the cross of obedience in the challenging circumstances of our daily lives, in the trials brought by the passing of years, in the sorrow that afflicts us when God calls our loved ones back to him. Loving obedience is the path to holiness, the way to the Father's house.

Conversation with Christ: Thank you, Lord, for giving us a school of loving obedience at Bethlehem, throughout your life and in your death on the cross. Help me to embrace suffering like you did and to be confident in its power to make me holy and win graces for souls.

Resolution: I will seek to recognize God's presence in my day by patiently welcoming the suffering and trials he permits, so he can bring about a greater good.

**The Audio version and the meditation are based on Matthew 17:9a, 10-13 while the Gospel read in the Maronite Church is Matthew 17:10-13*