

## Dirt and Dust

I had the opportunity to go to this community of people living in northern Ontario called Madonna house. They weren't monks, but there were people who had consecrated their lives to God. They could only shower once a week, they had outhouses for washrooms, and they ate a lot of beans and lentils. Despite all these potential hardships, these were some of the happiest people I have ever seen. It was like a saint making factory; you could look into their eyes and you could just see the love of God beaming from their hearts.

The founder of this community is Servant of God Catherine Doherty and after reading her writings I found out why that place was so special: Catherine said she tried to not think about herself for a whole day and she found it incredibly difficult.

The striving for constant self-forgetfulness by Catherine has overflowed into her community and it is evident in the way they live and the joy they have. **It is no wonder since they have modeled their lives according to the self-forgetfulness and humility of the Madonna herself, Mary.**

When we look at the song of Mary, also known as the Magnificat, we hear the praises of one who has forgotten about herself and remembered the Mighty God who has bared the strength of his arm. This song of Mary does not originate out of nowhere; it arises from the praise that comes from the lips of her cousin who is so honored to have the Queen Mother, the mother of the Messiah, the mother of the Lord come to visit her.

Imagine if someone came up to you and said: 'you are the most blessed out of all women; I am not worthy to have a visit from you; your greeting was so great that even my unborn child was happy to see you; and this is all possible because YOUR faith in God is incredible.' We could be tempted to say: now that you mention it...yea, I am pretty great! My faith is quite incredible...

Not with Mary. Her song did not begin with 'look how great I am', but 'look how great God is.' My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. If we listen carefully to the Magnificat, the song of Mary, we can see that she understood true humility, true self-forgetfulness.

True humility is the recognition of the truth. Humility comes from the word *humus* meaning dirt, or dust. So true humility reminds us that we are dust and unto dust we shall return. True humility recognizes that apart from the True Vine we can do nothing. Absolutely nothing. Even our existence itself is sustained by the hand of the almighty himself for 'all things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.'

Mary understood the depths of this truth, the depths of humility and so when Elizabeth praises her, she praises God as if to say: 'You praise me for my virtues, yet I tell you that it is the Mighty One who has done great things for me in my lowliness. Give your praises to him first and not to me.'

Fulton Sheen puts it this way: 'the egotist magnifies himself while Mary magnifies the Lord'.

We are three days away from Christmas and there will be plenty of praise and thanks happening. It will be a great opportunity to sing the song of Mary. When someone praises us it doesn't mean that we recite the whole Magnificat but rather it is an opportunity to point to God in a subtle way. 'Your turkey was amazing!' 'Praise God! I am so happy you like my new gravy.' or 'You are a wonderful host!' 'Thanks be to God! I am so happy to see you.'

We can be tempted to water down the praise and say this or that isn't that great, but true humility like Mary says, "Yes all generations will call me blessed **because** the Mighty One has done great things for me." So accept the praise in gratitude but direct it to its true source, and then we will have true humility because it is the recognition of the truth.