

Homily for the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
May 31, 2016

Today is the Feast of the Visitation a Holy Day the Church has marked since the 8th Century. In the Gospel reading we have these famous words of Mary.

My Soul Magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

What does it mean for Mary to say “my soul Magnifies the Lord?” Let’s look at it this way. Each one of us has a soul. The soul is that part of us that is to be shaped into the image of Christ. How we live, makes either a larger or a smaller image of him. The image is either dingy and dirty, or it is clean and bright. Therefore, when we make our soul large and magnify it by work, thought and speech, then the Lord himself is magnified in my soul, because it is an image of him. Just as the Lord is thus magnified in our image of him as we live in obedience; so too, if we live in disobedience, rather than magnifying the Lord his image is diminished and decreases within our lives.

In today’s Gospel we hear of how Mary magnifies the Lord in a specific way.

We are told that when Mary hears of Elizabeth’s pregnancy she went with haste to the hill country of Judah. The word “haste” not only means “with speed”, but there is also an implication of motive as well. It means to be done eagerly and with earnestness. She desired to go. Why is that? Well of course on one level she wanted to be with her older cousin in her pregnancy. However in that we remember this encounter whenever we say the Rosary suggests to us there is more going on here than meets the eye.

That something more is better understood when we can understand the Old Testament themes imbedded in this story. In the Old Testament we hear of a successor for David who will come from the City of David, Bethlehem. What did David do? He brought together the tribes of Israel, First Hebron in the south and then the tribes from the north came too. He brings them together and then establishes Jerusalem as his capital. Into the capital he brings the Ark of the Covenant so that this unified nation would worship God together. And then by the very clarity and beauty of its worship it would draw all the tribes of the world together. That is the story of David.

Notice how it is happening in the story of the Visitation. David brought the Ark of Covenant into Jerusalem and with reckless abandon he danced before the Ark.

Look at the overtones here. Mary comes into the hill country of Judah. That is exactly where David found the Ark. Here is Mary the true Ark of the Covenant. The ark contained remnants of the Ten Commandments and the Manna from the wilderness wanderings and the rod of Aaron the priest. Mary contained in her womb the word of God and the Bread of Life and Jesus the Great High Priest. How wonderful it is that just as David dances before the Ark, so too in the womb, John the Baptist does his own kind of Davidic dance before the true Ark of the Covenant, Mary.

This is why Elizabeth exclaims “Blessed are you among woman.” The Ark was the most revered Holy Object in Israel and here is the Blessed one, more holy still.

Here is the point I want to make. On one level this story is a simple narrative describing the generosity and servant heart of Mary who visits her cousin Elizabeth to assist with her pregnancy. Therefore it is an account of two women who in their love for each other celebrate their respective pregnancies.

At a deeper level it is the story of how their openness to the Lord allows for fulfillment of the story of David that looked forward to this encounter at Elizabeth’s house.

When we in turn seek to live our lives each day with a desire to magnify Jesus the events that make up our daily lives become holy ground. Because it is in these simple human encounters that with Mary, Elizabeth we are able to echo the words of St. Paul:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

People who take these words to heart will indeed sing:

My Soul Magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.