

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

“THE VISITATION: A GRACED ENCOUNTER”

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to turn to Mary in her visit to her cousin, Elizabeth. The visitation is a personal and moving moment, not only in the lives of these two women, but also in the life of John the Baptist, who was cleansed from original sin while still in the womb.

I found the following commentary helpful:

‘The Precursor and the Lord are both hidden from each other. Yet even before the two women embrace, John leaped for joy in his mother’s womb, having recognized the presence of the Lord and Messiah in the womb of Mary.’ⁱ

St Ambrose also commented on this graced encounter:

‘Elizabeth is the first to hear Mary’s voice, but John is the first to be aware of grace. [Elizabeth] hears with the ears of the body, but [John] leaps for joy at the meaning of the mystery. [Elizabeth] is aware of Mary’s presence, but [John] is aware of the Lord’s.’ⁱⁱ

When we focus on the women in today’s Gospel, we note that any personal agenda of Mary and Elizabeth is put aside. ‘Both [women] had good reason to be very preoccupied with their pregnancies and all that new life brings. Both women had a right to focus on themselves

for a while as they made new and radical adjustments to their daily lives. Mary reaches out to her kinswoman to help her and also to be helped by her. These two great biblical women consoled one another, shared their stories, and gave each other the gift of themselves in the midst of the new life that they must have experienced.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Note, also, Mary’s haste to visit her cousin in her need! St Ambrose of Milan comments on this: ‘delayed efforts are foreign to the grace of the Holy Spirit.’ Mary’s free choice to move forward and outward is reflective of a decision taken deep within her heart followed by immediate action.

As we reflect on Mary’s haste to act, we should look at ourselves:

‘How many things exist in our lives that we dreamed of doing, should have done, and never did? [Are there] letters that should have been written, dreams that should have been realized, gratitude that was not expressed, affection [that was] never shown, words that should have been said? Postponements and delays weigh heavily upon us, wear us down and discourage us. They gnaw away at us.’

‘How true St. Ambrose described Mary’s haste: the Spirit completely possessed the Virgin Daughter of Nazareth and compelled her to act.’

‘The story of the Visitation teaches us an important lesson: when Christ is growing inside of us, we will be led to people, places and situations that we never dreamed of. We will bear words of

consolation and hope that are not our own. In the very act of consoling others, we will be consoled. We will be at peace ... because we know that however insignificant our life and issues seem to be, from them Christ is forming himself. The women of today's Gospel show us that it is possible to move beyond our own little personal agendas and engage in authentic' and loving service of others.'^{iv}

Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta provides the following reflection on the life of Mary for our consideration:

'In the mystery of the Annunciation and the Visitation, Mary is the very model of the life we should lead. First of all, she welcomed Jesus in her existence; then, she shared what she had received. Every time we receive Holy Communion, Jesus the Word becomes flesh in our life – gift of God who is at one and the same time beautiful, kind, unique. Thus, the first Eucharist was such: Mary's offering of her Son in her, in whom he had set up the first altar. Mary, the only one who could affirm with absolute confidence, "this is my body", from that first moment offered her own body, her strength, all her being, to form the Body of Christ.'

ⁱ <http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/rosicareflections/sharing-the-new-life-within-us-a-reflection-on-the-feast-of-the-visitation-2>

ⁱⁱ From a commentary on Luke by Saint Ambrose, in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. I, pp. 353-4.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/rosicareflections/sharing-the-new-life-within-us-a-reflection-on-the-feast-of-the-visitation-2>

^{iv} Ibid.