

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 10th 2013

Today is our youngest son's birthday. He has become an incredible young adult and I still remember his birth like it was yesterday. When I held him for the first time, gazed into his large, amazing eyes and kissed his precious cheeks, I felt the ageless, maternal devotion of wonder, joy and mystery that a parent experiences the first time they see their baby. I thanked God and promised that I would protect him for all time. When we brought him home and introduced him to his two brothers, I whispered to him, Welcome home, dear son.

As I read today's Gospel from John I was touched by the words, When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.

Recently I traveled to the Dominican Republic as part of a trip to introduce the President of our University to our Jesuit mission in the Dominican Republic. Our days were tightly scheduled and filled with many people, activities and inspirational encounters.

On the last day of our trip, we traveled high into the mountains on very rugged roads to bless two new houses which had recently been built through a charitable foundation for two of the families in the campo/village. We were very late when we arrived but several members of the community and the two families were waiting for us welcoming us with enthusiasm, warm embraces and hospitality.

When the blessing ritual began at the first house, several people from the community spoke about the project. The final speaker was the mother of the family who would soon be living in the home. She was far along in her pregnancy and someone mentioned to me that she was expecting her sixth child. She smiled at everyone as she began to speak. Then she turned and gestured toward her new home. I will always remember her words: Everyone loves to be able to say: 'I'm going home.' My family and I have never had the opportunity to say those words. Now we have this home and we are deeply grateful to say: 'we are going home.' Suddenly I had a rush of memories of when we brought our babies home for the first time and it occurred to me that she would soon be able to whisper to her sixth child: Welcome home, dear baby.

Maybe it was her eloquence; perhaps it was the sight of her children or the beauty of her pregnant form; but her words about home touched me deeply and I felt a surge of tears. Her message was like a

balm which she poured lavishly on us that day. Although we were there with the President of the University to bless her new home, she had actually blessed us.

In today's first reading God reminds Paul: Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. The beautiful, pregnant mother on the mountaintop spoke to me that day. God was with her as she proclaimed her gratitude and joy. The words she had longed to say for a lifetime emerged as a sacred mantra, we are going home.

I reflected upon this encounter for several days. I prayed about my tears and I realized that she not only triggered my own memories about the true meaning of home but also raised the question in my heart of how often I may have taken for granted that I have always had a home. Home now has a new meaning for me.

Our youngest son and his wife are expecting their second child this month and will soon bring their baby into the love and safety of their home. May they and all of us remember that home is where God is and when we turn to God, God whispers welcome home to us and reminds us of the words from John's gospel ... your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy away from you.

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