

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, May 31st 2014

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb".

Tears of joy. Blessings. Swirling hope of new life. Miracles. The promise of salvation. Dedication of a "lowly servant." Rejoice. Mercy. Fear. Strength. Promise.

These are some of the words and images that come to me as I reflect upon today's Gospel and a painting that has hung in my home for several years, a birthday gift from my beloved wife.

The painting is called "The Windssock Visitation" by Brother Michael O'Neill McGrath, an Oblate of St. Frances de Sales.

I am especially drawn to the large heart at the center of the painting formed by the halos of Mary and Elizabeth at the top and the swirling life within them at the bottom. I can only imagine all the swirling emotions that accompany their encounter.

Below are a few words from an article including quotations from Brother Mickey about his painting:

The images that flow from Brother Mickey's paintbrush are full of whimsy and joy: mysteries of the rosary, scenes with saints, dark-skinned Marys. "All the big saints prayed before black Madonnas," he explained to me, "including St. Francis de Sales. They've always been associated with healing and new life ... the blackness of conception, creativity, fertile soil, seeds growing underground."

For centuries, he said, images of black Madonnas have offered special solace to those struggling to conceive and to those in need of a fresh start.

Brother Mickey's first black Madonna remains his favorite: a rendition of the Visitation, the second

joyful mystery of the rosary, whose feast we mark on May 31. In it we see young, pregnant Mary embrace her pregnant older cousin Elizabeth, arms intertwined, bellies touching.

To their left Brother Mickey painted a quote from St. Jane de Chantal, who co-founded the Visitation order of nuns with St. Francis de Sales: “This is the place of our delight and rest.”

The painting, titled “The Windsock Visitation,” hangs above the mantel in a North Minneapolis home occupied by Visitation sisters. They hang a windsock on their front porch to invite neighborhood kids over, a refuge in an impoverished area uprooted by a tornado [May 2011].

Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Elizabeth, pray for us. Amen.

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