

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 31st 2016

What a beautiful feast and set of readings that the Church gives us on this Feast of the Visitation of Mary! The second version of the second reading speaks eloquently to being Christ-like by giving directions on how to live. I am drawn today to share my reflections on the Gospel reading as well as two works of art centered on the Visitation.

As a (currently) pregnant woman, there are many connections and feeling that resonate with me in these readings. In the midst of all the other feelings, I identify a strong feeling of gratitude, echoed in the Gospel: “the Almighty has done great things for me and hold is his Name.” and those words echo in my mind and heart. I feel blessed, privileged and a bit daunted by the responsibility of carrying and caring for a little human being, but definitely grateful!

I can imagine the enthusiasm that Elizabeth and Mary had for each other in learning of the babies in each other’s wombs! I must say that I have a bit more appreciation for the Visitation since I have been pregnant before and I am now currently pregnant with my second child. These days, I am congratulated on my (now very noticeable) pregnancy and asked my due date by most anyone I run into. When I run into other pregnant women, there is an extra enthusiasm, excitement and mutual congratulating! I can imagine it is similar to Mary and Elizabeth’s joy and enthusiasm.

The first work of art is a poem by Joyce Rupp titled, “The Visitation” from her book, *Out of the Ordinary*:

Mary, you went hurriedly over hillsides,

Many of them, to be with aunt Elizabeth,

Whose womb also swelled with surprise

You, the woman of youth and vigor,

Weary from the long road’s rigors,

Wondering still about the mystery within

Elizabeth, wrinkled and wise,

Weary from the child kicking inside,

(already a hint of wildness in him)

The two of you, meeting at the door,

weeping and laughing at the same time,

Each one gasping at the other's fertility

And leaping between and among you,
those tow frisky fetuses, yet to be born,
the prophet and One to be proclaimed

Did they feel the love of your hospitality?

Did they swim and sway with your voice?

Did they listen with tiny, eager ears to all
that passed between the two of you
in the days and weeks that swiftly passed
growing and feeding on your rich love?

I don't know which I'd have wanted more,
to be in one of those glorious filled wombs

Or in the house of that woman-blessed place

As the weeks and months go on, I find my conversation with other pregnant women turning from initial enthusiasm to more practical conversations, whether in regard to our weariness or our wonder. At my daughter's small and community-centered school, there are five other mothers of students in her class that are pregnant - due with little sisters or little brothers this summer. Pick-up and drop-off conversations that I have with these other pregnant moms of my daughter's classmates turn to jokingly complaining about how big we feel, to who is caring for this new baby, details about delivery, recommendations for big brother or big sister books, etc.

During the three months that Mary remained with Elizabeth, I can imagine the conversations the two women had were not that different than the ones I am having with my peers and friends– about feeling the babies move in their bellies, about unusual pregnancy symptoms that affect one's body (there are so many), about the nervousness of the upcoming labor and delivery, about the joy and eager anticipation of holding that newborn in a few short months. As the poem highlights, I can imagine the babies felt the love, the voices, the enthusiasm of their mothers. I also sure hope Mary and Elizabeth were sitting and chatting (with their feet up) and getting a chance to rest as they enjoy the conversation and anticipation!

I would like to share another meaningful Visitation work of art that has inspired me, in case it might be helpful for you in your prayer with Mary, Elizabeth and Jesus today. It is from a greeting card that I received several years ago, from a wonderful friend and mentor of mine, who is a sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame. On the front of the card is a beautiful image of the Visitation with the line: "In each encounter, the Life within is ignited, begins to glow, to dance, to grow" (Visitation Image, by Mary Southard, CSJ, found here <http://ministryofthearts.org/visitation/>). This image is truly one of my favorite pieces of religious artwork.

I think all of us, pregnant or not, can relate or aspire to “igniting Life,” or bringing Christ into the world in joyful ways – glowing, dancing, growing, etc. All of us have a responsibility as Christians, as persons of faith, to nurture that essence of Christ within us, to share the good news of Christ, to model in our words and actions the joy and love God has for each one of us. May Mary and Elizabeth continue to be models for us in our Christian journeys!

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