

May we open the doors of our hearts to Him who comes, and our hands to receive the gift of peace!

Come, Lord, we await your return!

Happy Christmas 2012 and a blessed year 2013!

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Christmas Chapter 2012 Mary of the Visitation



When I was first thinking about writing this Christmas Chapter, I was full of the whole process of the **General Chapter**, from the CGP of 2011 right up to the experience of July 2012. It was a path of visitation which turned us, in joyful hope, towards the future, towards great meetings and interesting projects to be undertaken together. That is why the Gospel passage which immediately came to my mind was that of the Visitation, understood as the reception of the promised hope, hope of something new which is already in bud.

The Gospel scene of the **Visitation** enables us to be present at the meeting of two worlds, the one old and the other new, which is also the meeting of two women, Elizabeth and Mary. Their mutual welcome is a celebration, like the preface of the liturgy of the New Covenant of which Mary is the blessed Ark. Mary and Elizabeth offer to God the fruits of the faith which they are celebrating: the miracle child in Elizabeth and the ineffable **Incarnation** of the Son of God in Mary.

We are before a great Mystery, which the Virgin is bearing. Marie Eugenie used to say that it is “*consoling to speak of the Blessed Virgin*”; and we all need consolations in these uncertain times when the cosmos is disturbed, the spiral of violence continues to rage in so many countries and situations (wars in Syria and Congo Kinshasa, the slaughter of children in the schools of the USA and in China...), putting at risk the desires and the work for peace. That is why it is good to accompany Mary, woman of faith, in her visit to Elizabeth.

humanity. With Elizabeth we take part in the celebration of the liturgy inaugurated by Mary’s Son.

This is not the end: having brought to her cousin the support she needed, Mary returned home in the *silence* of her heart, to ordinary life, the place where we experience the mercy of the Lord. Model of faith and hope, she continues to journey with us along our human roads, in the pilgrimage which leads us to God. As the first disciple of her Son, she expresses her faith throughout her life right up to the foot of the cross. The life of Mary was nothing but exultation; nevertheless, she lived fully this moment of meeting as she will live with the same plenitude the sorrowful passage of the Passion of her Son. So today, we can take the time with her to taste the message of this visitation. Let us dare to be joyful despite all that comes from the four corners of the world, marked by trials of every kind.

Let us allow Mary to take us by the hand, allow ourselves to be accompanied and taught by her. Then like her, mystics and prophets, we will recognise “*in the apparent chaos and accelerated rhythm of events a Kairos moment, God’s time which we must profit of to offer what we are with humility, courage and lucidity. How can we not proclaim the life which is coming to birth, identify and fight today’s idolatries which obscure the face of God and the human person, which disperse and demoralise? The world needs watchers who scan the horizon and recognise in this Kairos the humble and slow germination of the Kingdom.*”³

³ General Chapter, Contemplative identity, Introduction, § 2

action, a time of presence which, first of all enables a “being with” so as to sense what there is to do. A time of mutual welcome and sharing of feelings, a time of gratuity, a time lost and time gained, a necessary time for our lives to find their meaning again and to build **communion**. Mary stayed with Elizabeth so as to put herself at the latter’s service and to taste the deep joy of her gift. For this one must sit down, be close, take time. Isn’t it this that we contemplate in the Son of God, who himself willed to share our human nature? *“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jn.1:14).

The Gospel does not say that there was a discernment before Mary set off on the tortuous mountain roads of Judea. But without any doubt she knew why she was leaving in haste. She was bearing great and good news she must proclaim. She was the messenger of the **News** of news. She did not want to keep it to herself any longer. Mary went to Judea because she believed what she had been told about Elizabeth. She was transported by joy to the house of Zachary. Her heart was already burning for Him whom she had just conceived, He who had become her life, **LIFE** itself.

As the first evangelist Mary enables Jesus to pay a visit to his cousin John the Baptist. She already bears the mission of her Son and is preparing that of his Precursor. Through the greeting of Mary, John the Baptist receives the gift of the Spirit at the same time as his mother. Faith and joy, then, are mingled in Mary. She sings the praise of the Lord in response to the greeting of Elizabeth. She proclaims and confirms the accomplishment of God’s plan in her, the most humble of creatures: *“The Almighty has done marvels for me, all generations will call me blessed.”* (Lk.1:49).

Walking at the side of Mary, we experience a life-giving presence. The child Elizabeth is carrying recognises this presence in Mary, receptacle and host of the Son of God come to dwell in our

Mary the believer

“Blessed is she who believed” (Lk. 1:45), exclaimed Elizabeth, putting Mary before God’s project for her and inviting us to contemplate her. In this year dedicated to faith, let us take the time to look at Mary, figurehead of the adventure of the people of God, heiress of the long line of men and women of faith who have opened the way which goes from earth to heaven. By her faith she has given us the Saviour.

Blessed is she who believed: Mary acquiesced in the plan of God, to his desire to make her collaborate in the coming of the new man and the new woman, inhabitants of an earth where justice, peace, fraternity and solidarity reign. Let us look at her hurrying on the paths of communion, her heart beating with joy and gratitude. Mary, Mother and Vessel of the “**Wisdom**” of the Father, goes to meet Elizabeth, who is bearing the greatest of the children of men (Mt. 11:11), prophet of the new times, Precursor of the Son of Man.

Blessed is she who believed: what she has been told by the Lord will be accomplished! Elizabeth does not say “blessed is she to whom it has been given to believe”, but “blessed is she who has believed”, thus recognising that Mary has made a decisive act of faith. This blessing will be accomplished in the daily activities of Mary’s life, through joys and trials, questionings and hopes...

Faith is a gift but it is also a decision: the decision to say “yes”, the decision to trust, to believe in the person who is speaking to me and who is hoping for a reply, to believe in what is beyond me, frightens me, makes me insecure, displaces me, perhaps upsets me. For Mary, *“the fullness of grace announced by the angel means the gift of God’s very self; the faith of Mary, proclaimed by Elizabeth... shows how the*

Virgin of Nazareth responded to this gift”So it is for us also to make the decision to believe or not to believe.

The Gospel opens with the faith of Mary, a faith which is part of the long history begun by Abraham and which provokes the amazement of Elizabeth. Yes, Mary is “blessed” because, by this faith, she has enabled the accomplishment of the plan of God for humanity.

Mary, Our Lady of the way



After the final word of the Angel of the Annunciation, Mary gives up her questioning. She has become capable of letting go of her desires and projects, and even of braving the scandal that the news of her inexplicable pregnancy could provoke. She leaves, she runs to the help of her elderly cousin. Isn't this an invitation for us to cast aside our sadness and the pessimism we consent to so as to receive the joy of God and explore the surprising new life

which is seeking to spread and is waiting to be shared in abundance?

So Mary leaves in haste to be with Elizabeth. She was driven from within, she felt that she was being carried along. Her step became

¹ Redemptoris Mater N° 12

nimble and dancing. This journey upsets our usual image of Mary as a woman of silence and contemplation. Her relationship with God, lived in the intimacy of her heart, has drawn her out of herself so as to go and meet her cousin. The presence of God in Mary so moves Elizabeth that the child she is carrying leaps for joy (Lk. 1:44): Elizabeth dances in her turn in receiving Mary, the Blessed among all women and her Son. In return she herself receives with stunned astonishment a blessing of which she feels unworthy.

The Lord is a radiating presence at work in our lives. For we can only radiate what makes us live, what we are carrying in our fragile vessels. So it is with Mary! Already she is offering the One who is living in her body, that is why at the sound of her voice Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and the infant within her leaps. Of course, Mary does not give the Holy Spirit, but she participates in his arrival in Elizabeth and John the Baptist (Lk.1:41). Thus Elizabeth becomes the one through whom the Holy Spirit confesses that Mary is the Mother of the Lord².



Mary, the first evangelist

Mary then takes the time to stay with her cousin, to procure for her all the help she needs in waiting for the arrival of her child. But what exactly was she doing staying with Elizabeth? The time taken, the time given so as to remain is a time of attentiveness and

² F. Breynaert, quoting Mario MARSINI, *Il saluto di Elisabetta a Maria (Lc 1,42)*, in the revue *Marianum* n°58, Rome, 1988, pp. 138-158