

Mary Heroine for God, for our sake

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CYCLE C

Micah 5:1–4
Hebrews 10:5–10
Luke 1:39–45

GATHERING

(As the community gathers, the Advent wreath is lit. The community sings, "O, Come, O Come, Emmanuel".)

Last week we encountered the waiting John the Baptizer and the people who were full of expectation. This week we move back in *story-time* to Mary and Elizabeth and the period of their expectancies.

The community comes to order with some sharing of the week's experiences. Particular attention is given to the influence of the last meeting on one's approach to the events of this past week.

OPENING PRAYER

(Some quiet instrumental music is played as the community sits for a while in silence.)

Leader: Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

All: Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Leader: O shepherd of Israel, hearken, from your throne upon the

cherubim, shine forth. Rouse your power, and come to save us.

All: Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Leader: Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see. Take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted [the son of man whom you yourself made strong].

All: Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Leader: May your help be with the one on your right hand, with the son of man whom you yourself made strong. Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

All: Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Focus Question

Recall an experience of trust fulfilled and trust betrayed? What did it feel like?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Gospel: Luke 1:39–45

COMMENTARY¹

Known traditionally as the story of the "Visitation", this account serves a special linking role in the larger Lukan gospel narrative. It serves as a narrative hinge between the two accounts which *announce* the births of John the Baptizer, and of Jesus on the one hand, and the two subsequent stories which *record* their births. As such this story of encounter between the two mothers serves to clarify the relationship of the two sons in terms of the big story.

To trust or not to trust -- one of life's great questions.

There is something in us which spontaneously, unreflectively trusts life. We drink water and eat food depending that it will refresh, nourish and sustain us. We enter homes and other buildings whose construction we take for granted will shelter us safely. Day by day we pass people on the street expecting that they mean us no harm. We anticipate that family and friends care for us.

But then water may be polluted and food contaminated. Faulty wiring may cause a home to burn. People get mugged on the street. Children are sometimes abused. Relationships fail. Experience teaches us caution, even suspicion.

To maintain trust as an adult means to accept risk, to be willing to walk in the dark as well as in the light. It means that we must live forward with confidence in the midst of ambiguity.

Advent is a time of trust and hope, a time of containment, of quiet waiting; it is Mary's season *par excellence*. And it is the image of Mary which dominates the biblical scene of this week's liturgy.

Mary – virgin, mother, woman of faith, the first Christian. She is the first to say "yes" to Jesus Lord. Mary is God's heroine for our sake. She opens herself to being impregnated by God's word. She submits herself to a radical transformation. In doing so, in giving flesh to him who is Christ for us, she is the first among us who may point to Jesus and say: "This is my body; this is my blood."

"Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."

The model disciple, she exhibits in her life the pattern for conversion: openness to God's word, submission to transformation by the implanted word, the realization of the divine life within.

We need not, indeed can not accomplish the whole work. Our task is to trust, to cultivate the disposition of openness, and receptivity, to expect that the Lord's words to us will be fulfilled.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. With which image of Mary do you most resonate: virgin, mother, queen, heroine, woman of faith, disciple? Perhaps some other..?
2. What new thing wants to be born within you?
3. On a continuum of 1 to 10 -- with 1 representing *acute suspicion* and 10 representing *profound trust* where is your standpoint in life?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

1. Make the *Visitation* take on new meaning in this age; reach out to a woman with an unwanted pregnancy. Contact **Birthright organization near you**. This is an organization which assists pregnant women who seek an alternative to abortion.
2. Spend twenty minutes to a half hour in shared silence with a spouse or friend waiting for the coming of God's reign.
3. Reach out to women and children whose trust in life has been wounded by abuse and violence.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

Magnificat of Acceptance

Side 1: My soul trembles in the presence of the loving Creator and my spirit prepares itself to walk hand in hand with the God who saves Israel because I have been accepted by God
as a simple helpmate.

Side 2: Yes, forever in the life of humankind people will sing of this loving encounter; through remembering this moment, the faithful

will know all things are possible in God.

Side 1: Holy is the place within me where God lives.
God's tender fingers reach out from age to age
to touch the softened inner spaces of those
who open their souls in hope.

Side 2: I have experienced the creative power of God's
embracing arms and I know the cleansing fire
of unconditional love.

Side 1: I am freed from all earthly authority
and know my bonding to the Author of all
earthly things.

Side 2: I am filled with the news of good things;
my favor with God,
faithful trust in the gentle shadow of
the Most High, the mystery of my son, Jesus,
the gift of companionship with my beloved
kinswoman, Elizabeth, who believes as I believe.

Side 1: The place in my heart that I had filled
with thoughts of fear and inadequacy
has been emptied and I am quiet within.

Side 2: God comes to save Israel, our holy family,
remembering that we are the ones who remember,
...according to the kinship we have known...
remembering that we are the ones who remember
and that where God and people trust each other
there is home.

(The light in the room is reduced to a bare minimum.)

Leader: Let us be empty and quiet within.

(Pause for two to three minutes of silence.)

Leader: Hail Mary....

Let us visit each other with a sign of peace.

