

A Lesson from Our Blessed Mother

Thanksgiving Day – (Lk 1: 39-56)

Ave Maria Catholic Church, November 25, 2021 - Fr. David M Vidal

On this Thanksgiving Day, when we come to Church to give thanks to God as God's family, what better lesson of thanksgiving can we have than the message of the visitation of our Blessed Mother to her cousin Elizabeth!

The whole story, the complete scene, is a hymn of thanksgiving! First, Elizabeth exclaimed: "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*" (Luke 1:45). Then, Mary said: "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.*"

This is a story of joy and blessedness. However, it does not mean that the visitation story is deprived of challenges and sacrifices. First, let us see the challenges in the life of Elizabeth: Elizabeth was considered "barren," (something that was seen as a real disgrace), and her husband, Zechariah, was already "well advanced in years." Zechariah could not bring himself to believe the message of the Archangel Gabriel that his wife would conceive a child, (Luke 1:36-37). Let us think about the emotions that Elizabeth and Zechariah experienced. Elizabeth had to suffer the anxieties of pregnancy at an old age. Not only was Zechariah fearful, but because of his doubt, he was mute during the entire period of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Now, let us direct our attention to Mary. She ran in haste to help her cousin Elizabeth. And we know that she did not speak to Joseph about the mystery of the Annunciation because she believed that God himself would intervene. We also know that Joseph was in great distress when he learned that Mary was expecting a child; and we know about his decision to abandon Mary in secret. We can reflect on Mary's emotions as she thought about Joseph's distress.

The story of the visitation is not without its challenges and anxieties. Nevertheless, even in the midst of those anxieties and difficulties, what comes from the hearts of Elizabeth and our Blessed Mother is a hymn of thanksgiving. This is the first lesson of the visitation: **We must thank God at all times.** We must bless God in moments of peace and tranquility, and in moments of difficulties and trials because even in the midst of our difficulties God continues to pour out his blessings on us! Just the action of being able to raise our voices in gratitude to God is God's blessing!

From the story of the visitation, we can draw a second lesson: **We must have a grateful reading of the past!**

Mary said: "*The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the*

arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever,” (Luke, 1: 49-55).

Mary remembers. She remembers those who were humbled, oppressed, and hungry, but waiting with faith and trust for the fulfillment of God’s promise, the fulfillment of the promise of redemption. She reads the past with gratitude! She has the profound conviction that even the most difficult moments of the past, God is always present as Lord of history, and nothing happens without His knowledge and permission. Mary acknowledges that the sacrifices of those who were waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises are now rewarded and in abundance! For this reason, She said: *“My soul magnifies the Lord.”*

From Mary’s visitation we can draw a third lesson that brings true light to our Thanksgiving: The gratitude of our Blessed Mother is shown more in actions than in words.

Yes, she sang a most beautiful hymn, but more importantly, she offered concrete actions of gratitude to the Lord.

Mary’s kindness to her old cousin Elizabeth shows how deep was her love for God. Mary went in haste to assist Elizabeth who was in need. And Mary’s assistance to Elizabeth was not limited merely to physical help; Mary brought Elizabeth physical, emotional, and spiritual consolations. As such, in her actions towards her aging cousin, she was performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Even before Jesus gave us the new commandment to love, Mary was already practicing it. Jesus will later say: *“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you,”* (John 15:12). Mary is already practicing the commandment Jesus will give because Jesus is not only in her womb, but He is also and most explicitly, in her heart. Mary, who is the Mother of God, is at the same time “the first disciple of Jesus.”

This is our third lesson of the visitation: if we recognize that we are blessed by God, then **we must communicate God’s blessings, we must share God’s blessings with concrete works of love and thanksgiving.**

This is the time to be grateful! This is the time to say thank you!

When people do not value time, as they ought, then what regrets would people have, once they realize what they ‘should have or could have done’? How many opportunities slip away! A chance to do someone good that was never taken! Loving words that were never spoken! Thankfulness that was never shown! Letters or messages that were never sent! Pardon for someone that was never given! Or perhaps, forgiveness that was never

asked! Relationships that were never mended! Care and affection never shown! Trials that were handled without patience and faith!

This is our time to give thanks! Let us learn from our Blessed Mother: Could our Blessed Mother have shown that she truly cared for Elizabeth without visiting her? Likewise, could we say that we truly care for others and turn our back on them? If we hear the voice of God calling us to be grateful with concrete actions, we must also do it in haste, as our Blessed Mother did! Mary heard, accepted God's invitation, and followed it without any delay. Let us show how grateful we are for God's blessing; with kind actions and compassion, by helping our neighbors in their material and spiritual needs.

The visitation of our Blessed Mother to her cousin Elizabeth is a loving invitation to us from our Blessed Mother to be imitators and not spectators of Jesus. She invites us to be grateful and thankful with words and actions. She invites us to say: Happy Thanksgiving with our very lives.

Today, as we celebrate "Thanksgiving Day," let us ask our Blessed Mother to follow her example, showing our gratitude for God's blessings: 1. By being grateful to God at all times, in moments of joy and in moments of sorrow. 2. By reading the past with faith and trust, having the profound conviction that God is the Lord of history. 3. By showing our gratitude to others with loving and merciful deeds. Amen.