



Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Homily

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Sunday 16 July, 2017

In the prayer we know as the Magnificat, a prayer that the sisters pray every evening as part of Vespers, Mary proclaims that *"all generations will call me blessed"*. It is the prayer she prays when greeting her cousin Elizabeth, who like Mary herself is soon to give birth to a son. Today we form part of that great cloud of witnesses who call Mary blessed as we join together to rejoice in and thank God for the gift of Mary whom today we honour under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

In her Magnificat prayer, Mary goes on to explain why her name will be blessed by the Christian community as the ages go by: it is, she says, because *"he who is mighty has done great things for me - and holy is his name."*

This prayer reveals to us the heart of this woman who, in being the mother of Christ, is the mother of all who find themselves in him, this woman, who is the mother of the Church, the mother of our family of faith. In proclaiming the holiness of God's name, and in acknowledging that all she has is a gift from the Lord, Mary, as soon as we turn to her, immediately points us to God. Given to us as our mother on Calvary, this woman is revealed to us from the moment we first meet her in the gospels as the first and greatest disciple of her Son. She has no desire for or need of our praise. What she longs for, and looks for from us, is that we take to our hearts the words she once spoke to the stewards at the wedding feast in Cana: *"You do whatever he, Jesus, tells you"*.

These words of course are an echo of the words Mary herself spoke at the time of the annunciation of the Lord's birth. Speaking to the angel Gabriel, who had announced to Mary that she was to become the Mother of the Saviour, Mary said, *"Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me"*.

Both at the time of the Annunciation and at the wedding feast of Cana Mary shows herself to be a woman of great faith. She also shows us that this faith is both a gift from God and, in a sense, something which does not always come easily. In our own struggles with faith, in our own uncertainties, doubts and confusion, it is good to look to Mary and draw strength from knowing that for her, too, it was not always easy to respond to God - and yet she always did.

When Mary is greeted by the angel Gabriel with the words, *"Hail, you who are full of grace, the Lord is with you"*, she was, we are told, deeply troubled. As a good Jewish girl Mary would have known that this kind of greeting, so commonly found in the Jewish scriptures, always preceded the giving of a divine mission - and Mary, in her simplicity and humility, could not understand why she would have been singled out. The angel goes on to explain what God is asking of her and



Mary's fear turns into confusion. Although engaged she is not yet married and may already have had some intuition that marriage was not for her. Certainly the call to life-long virginity was not known in Judaism, but this does not mean that the Lord was not stirring in her heart, leading her towards this strange lifestyle. *"How can all this be?"* Mary says, *"since I am a virgin?"*

How often in our own lives does the in-breaking of God unsettle us, frighten us, and confuse us? "Surely," we say, "God cannot be asking this of me." And yet, so often, God does ask of us more than we want to give or think we are capable of giving. How do we move beyond our fear, our confusion and our doubt to that point where, like Mary, we can say, *"Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let God's will be done in me"*?

Our path towards this moment of trusting faith will be the same as Mary's. Like her we will need to hear, and believe, and live by the words which the angel says to Mary and which Mary and the Church now say to us: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will cover you with its shadow"*. The Lord promised that he would send us his Spirit and the Lord is always faithful to his promises. Indeed the words the angel spoke to Mary might almost be an explanation of what our sacraments of baptism and confirmation are really all about: the fulfilment of the Lord's promise to give us the gift of his Spirit, the Spirit which Saint Paul assures us has been poured into our hearts.

When Mary now says to us, as she once did, in spite of her Son's seeming reluctance, to the stewards at Cana, *"You do whatever my Son tells you"* she knows she is not asking us to do the impossible. We have the assurance of her own motherly and prayer-filled support, we have the power of the Holy Spirit who covers us with his shadow and we have the words of Jesus who says to us, as he did to his first disciples: *"Have courage, do not be afraid, I am with you"*. It is all gift, of course, and gifts have to be received with gratitude and embraced with enthusiasm if they are to be all that the giver intends them to be, but the Lord's gifts are always on offer. We only have to reach out and receive them.