Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2021

INTRODUCTION

We hope you enjoy this aid to your scripture reflection, alone or with others, during this Advent. Prayer is an integral part of our Synodal journey. This Advent why not take time to reflect on our Sunday Gospels. Take a moment to slow down in our busy world.

Lectio Divina is a practical approach to praying the scriptures. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Lectio Divina* occurs "where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer." The three key moments of this approach to the scriptures are reading, reflection and prayer. We read the Word of God to understand it; we reflect on the Word to see how it can apply to our lives; we pray in order to be transformed by the Word.

These three "moments" of *Lectio Divina* can be summed up by three questions:

i. When we read, we ask: "What does the text say in itself?"
ii. When we reflect, we ask: "What does the text say to me/us?"
iii. When we pray, we ask: "What does the text lead me/us to say?"

Ossory Adult Faith Development
Tel 056 7753624 Email afd@ossory.ie Web www.ossory.ie

READ
REFLECT
PRAY

FOURTH SUNDAY

LUKE 1:39-45

READ

Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy.

Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'
This is the Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

When we meet her in this Gospel reading, Mary has just said her 'yes' to God's plan, communicated by the Angel Gabriel. That episode ends on a sobering note: we're told that once Mary said, 'let your word be done to me,' the angel left her. Mary was not going to experience constant light and peace; she would have to walk in faith – and often in darkness.

Did the departure of the angel plunge Mary into confusion? Far from it. Her very first action after giving her consent to God's plan is to visit someone else who is caught up in that plan. The Gospel tells us that Mary went hastily, 'as quickly as she could,' to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This is not an incidental or by-the-way observation. Mary is filled with good news; the Good News Himself is growing within her. And good news demands to be shared! The urgently felt need to share what God is doing, and to enter into in communion with others, is a sign of authentic faith.

It's striking that the unfolding of Luke's Gospel allows no time for Mary to enter into contemplation once the angel has left her; she does not take time to 'process' what she has experienced. The only process that interests Mary is sharing the Good News with her cousin. It's not mistaken to see Mary's arduous journey to the hill country of Judah as an act of kindness towards her older cousin, who is six months pregnant, but it is far more than that. Mary will certainly be of help to her older cousin, but any practical help she will offer in the remaining three months of Elizabeth's pregnancy springs

from her sense of being blessed, her sense of carrying a message of joy which she cannot but communicate.

There is a tremendous lesson in all of this, one that can put our 'good deeds' in a proper – and lovely – perspective. For Christians, the good we seek to do for others flows, or should flow, from the conviction of having been blessed. To come to the assistance of our sisters and brothers is not so much a moral burden, as the necessary, natural consequence of having goodness to share. Goodness does not want to be alone! Mary hastened to visit Elizabeth not because she was lonely but because she was overflowing with goodness.

What happens when the two cousins are united? There is deep joy, with greeting and leaping! Notice that Mary's greeting is mentioned three times, and twice we hear that the unborn John leaps in his mother's womb. The joy being shared is not some cerebral abstraction, but a felt delight that leads to a cry of ecstasy.

PRAY

Lord, we thank you for the Good News received and carried by Mary. Help us, like Mary, to experience the sharing of the Gospel as a joyful imperative, rather than as a challenge, a burden, or a crisis. May we come to understand – and to experience – that the most authentic response to what you are doing is joy, delight. When we feel that the angel has left us, may we not fall into sadness or worry, but hasten, in a spirit of faith, to share your blessings with others. Amen.

Our Synodal Prayer: We stand before you, Holy Spirit, as we gather together...

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PRAYER FOR THE UNIVERSAL SYNODAL PATHWAY

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

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