

Other Resources

Providence Articles
Providence Blessing
Litany of Divine Providence
To BE Providence



On Keeping Providence

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Before you read this article, reflect and jot down a few ideas of your understanding of “Keeping Providence.”

The process view of a Provident God that Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP, outlines so well can lead us to a more dynamic and intimate familiarity with that Provident God who delights in creation and communion with all creatures. And, the vulnerable Jesus that Louis Roy, OP, presents as experiencing God’s presence in the midst of seeming absence in his Passion, challenges us to seek meaning and direction at those same crossroads in our own lives where inner and outer forces intersect either to build or diminish God’s kingdom-in-the-making.

What mysteries we probe and what depths we plumb when we relate to a process view of God-provident. This is a God with the same hungers for co-creation and communion that we have, and a God, vulnerable and creatively challenged by creatures who continually plunge themselves into personal and cosmic dark nights, brought on by their own refusal to grow in consciousness.

Though we cannot clearly articulate a process spirituality of Providence, we continue to grow into one just living [now] where we face exciting and frightening decisions regarding meaning and survival.

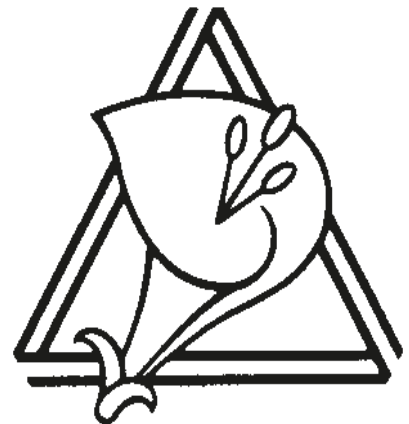
A process view of spirituality can free us from the endless puzzles and ponderous problems of the classical approach to Providence, all the while preserving the best of that tradition’s insights. It can set us free from the struggle to figure out and follow an unfathomable Divine Plan and Will and invite us to participate in a process of transformation, a journey to wholeness and holiness.

We enter the Living Water which flows unceasingly and which is a source of all of the creative and healing energies which we have always attributed to Providence. Once inside that process of wholeness, we need only to cooperate, as did DeCaussade, by loving and accepting the present moment as the best moment, trusting in God’s universal goodness. It is as if, once in the unknown and all-uniting depths, we freely board a ship whose final destiny has been set by a wise Guide, capable of flexible maneuvers, improvisations, and creative twists and turns on a perilous course. It is our capacity for self-surrender, for healthy vulnerability and our delicate and decisive responses to the promptings and lures of this gracious Guide which brings us Home to Wholeness.

We are not long in this growth process before we, like Jesus, encounter evil and suffering. We, too, must struggle to find meaning and direction in the midst of our own Gethsemanes. We come to ponder more in prayer and to live with more confidence the gospels of Providence -- those scripture texts which exhort us as individuals and as nations to let go of our addiction to try to fix and control everything and everyone and especially ourselves.

These same texts warn us that the more desperately we continue our “barn-building,” (or should I say bomb-building), our seeking of security through domination and control, the more we continue to try to provide for ourselves, then the less God can provide for us.

We also come, like Jesus, to learn from nature how to be in our lives in non-anx-



ious and non-controlling ways. It is only when we let go and trust in Providence that we are free of our patterns of addiction.

Healers today tell us that at a certain point in the creative and healing processes, a mysterious element, which we call grace, suddenly becomes operative and releases the creative images and healing energies needed to transform our distressed and diseased lifestyles into more healthy and holy ones.

This co-creative work, this process of transformation, makes full use of our human freedom and gifts. It also requires a keen knowing of when and how to be vulnerable and to let go in a healthy self-surrender that invites God's grace to work in our lives, bringing order out of chaos and beauty from pain.

DeCausade speaks eloquently and fondly of the two hands of God: one hand that knows how to nourish and sustain, and the other that mysteriously knows how to administer just the right amount of darkness. Only when we come to know both hands of God will we, like Jesus, come to realize that there is no other road to holiness and wholeness than the path through Gethsemane on the road to Calvary.

This realization enables us to open ourselves in trusting surrender to God's love and grace, even in the dark nights of contemplative living and prayer. Such vulnerability before God, allows God to grace and gift us with creative and healing energies. Our only task is to go about sharing this divine energy with all the people and in all the places and institutions in need of hope and healing.

As Women of Providence, we have always wrestled with the effects of sin, evil and suffering. At this time in history, we may also be called to better understand so as to more faithfully and fully incarnate that aspect of trust in Providence that Jesus embodied in Gethsemane and on Calvary: the Suffering Servant who with full consciousness and freedom gave up his own life and ego so that his hidden, deeper self, could emerge and grow strong.

The more consciously aware and involved we are in this process of co-creation, this soul-making, this kingdom-building, the quicker we are to perceive and affirm Providence at work in the present moment. Such a growing person freely forwards the Divine Plan and Will, content to know what they have to do with creating and sustaining the harmony, unity and community that a Provident God is, and toward which Providence lures us.

Such persons no longer spend energy trying to figure out why bad things happen to good people. They are in tune with the intuitions of the mystics who know that God does not cause evil, even though God does know how to work in and through evil and suffering.

They also know from their own lived experience that suffering can deepen compassion and strengthen inner muscles, leaving a residue of wisdom that enables a spiritually refined person to penetrate with serenity life's paradoxes and mysteries.

As people grow in consciousness and inner freedom, they are more able to live confidently with the contradictions of a cosmos moving painfully and slowly through evil and suffering on the road to greater interiority, complexity and unity.

However, the interplay between suffering and growth in consciousness can continue to baffle them, as it did the lady Julian of Norwich, who found herself ever astonished by the constant mingling of woe and well-being.

As Women of Providence, we constantly spend our lives in this same mix of well-being and woe. How Provident we would be if we could share with others our own intimacy with a Provident God who is vulnerable, resilient and compassionate; who respects our freedom; encourages our cooperation and desires our company; who is creatively challenged by our sins and failures. This is the same God that the process thinkers are struggling to uncover and reveal.



Julian of Norwich uses a lovely and quaint phrase which I love when she speaks of “keeping Providence. I would like to suggest that we as Providence people, can best “keep Providence” by making beauty from the pain and suffering we experience in our lives and ministries.

It is the beauty that comes out of pain which will connect us with the crucified God of Beauty and the beauty of all creatures involved in the struggle for transformation and wholeness. We best “keep Providence” when we encourage our selves fully in the life-long process of finding and sharing our own inner beauty and the beauty of all other creatures, a beauty wrought from suffering. For in the end, we are saved only by Beauty and its power to transform pain into consciousness.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

Full authority has been given to me, both in heaven and on earth; go therefore and make disciples of all nations... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And, know that I am with you until the end of time.

Mark 28:19-20

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ In what ways have you expanded your awareness of the phrase “Keeping Providence?”
- ◆ What is your comfort level in sharing with another “of our own intimacy with a Provident God who is vulnerable, resilient, and compassionate; who respects our freedom; encourages our cooperation and desires our company; who is creatively challenged by our sins and failures?”
- ◆ Julian suggests “we keep Providence by making beauty from the pain and suffering we experience in our lives and ministries; by finding and sharing our inner beauty and the beauty of all other creatures; a beauty wrought from suffering.” Are you more inclined to share “good experiences” of “the beauty of suffering” to those you encounter on a regular basis or to those you meet less frequently? Is there a major difference between “Keeping Providence” and “Making God’s Providence more visible in our world?”

PSALM FRAGMENT

God, you are my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? You are the stronghold of my life; of whom should I be afraid? Show me, O God, your way and lead me on a level path. I believe that I shall see Your goodness in the land of the living. Let your heart take courage.

Psalm 27

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Mention your own special intentions.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Help me, Yahweh to honor my limitations and the limitations of others as I grow in my love of You and others.

Because we believe that Providence works good out of every evil, we must surely be meant to look for that good and to learn what life lessons we can from it.

Mary Ellen Rufft, CDP



Praying With The Poor

Donald Dorr, A Maryknoll Father

An excerpt from the chapter, Prayer and Providence, from *Spirituality and Justice*.

A crucial question arises, what should I ask for when I pray with people who are oppressed or desperately poor? Should I encourage them to pray to God to take away their troubles? That is the kind of prayer that really annoys many of those who are committed to the struggle for justice. Their main objections to it can be summed up in two closely related points:

They see it as an escapist form of prayer. For it can give people the illusion that they are doing something to change their situation, when in fact, they are making no practical effort to deal with the source of their problems.

The second objection to this kind of prayer is that it encourages a passivity that is rooted in fatalism: if the prayer is not answered, people will think that God approves of the evils they have to endure.

These are very cogent objections. So it seems to me that anybody who prays with the poor ought to do so in a way that does not encourage escapism or fatalism. Indeed, the prayer itself should help people to overcome these temptations. The only proviso is that this should not be done in an arrogant way.

The need to be sensitive to 'where people are at' is particularly important in the case of the very poor or marginalized people who feel that nobody respects them. This means that one may have to begin with a form of prayer in which one begs God to take away the trouble. But, in the course of the prayer one can endeavor to raise the consciousness of the person or group.

The poor can be helped to see that their suffering is not part of God's plan, nor is it the result of the order of nature; it arises mainly from the injustice of individuals or society. Of course, most people who are crushed by poverty are well aware that they are being mistreated and exploited. But quite commonly this awareness is not allowed to surface in their prayer.

An escapist and fatalistic type of religion creates in the poor a kind of self-deception or false consciousness, one that smothers the sense of injustice that they feel.

Authentic prayer does not therefore have to set out to stir up anger and a sense of injustice in people. The task is simply to facilitate them in getting in touch with their real feelings and expressing them honestly to God. Prayer is not to be reduced to political education; but what is in question here is, rather, a religious education. The poor are to be helped to understand the nature and concerns of the true God.

Perhaps no religious concept has been so abused as that of providence. A false conception of God's will has been invoked to justify colonial conquest, racism, the gross exploitation of the poor by the rich, and shameless abuses of political and ecclesiastical power. The clearest examples can be found in the history of Latin America over the past few hundred years.

There is one important point to note about the distorted notion of providence that was brought to that continent, and indeed to the rest of the Third World as well. It was not simply that a fatalistic piety was given to the poor and oppressed, one that taught them to accept their sufferings as the will of God. There was also the other side of the coin: the colonial soldiers were taught to believe that they were the agents of God in their conquest. A passive version of providence marked the religion



of the poor while a very active version of it legitimated the oppressive actions of the oppressors. The main aim of liberating religion must be to correct these distortions.

In chapter 3 of this book, I gave an account of the God that was glorified by Mary in her song of praise, Luke 1:46-55. This is a God who is actively involved in rescuing the poor from those who oppress them. To proclaim one's faith in such a God is to challenge the distorted notion of providence which I have outlined above.

Any religion or theology which encourages people to work for justice and liberation must have an explicit or implicit teaching on providence. But many Third World theologians seem to be rather reluctant to speak very explicitly about providence. I suspect that this is partly because they have not fully freed themselves from the inadequacies of recent Western theology. But another reason may be that they fear that the concept, 'providence,' cannot be rescued from the distortions of the past. It remains too tied up with fatalistic attitudes.

I believe, however, that the notion of providence, and even the word itself, are too important to be abandoned. It is better to mount a direct challenge to the wrong teaching of the past. The Bible provides an abundance of material for a positive and active concept of providence, one that underpins our efforts to promote human liberation.

In the Old Testament, the Exodus story is the primary instance of active involvement by God in the liberation of his people. It is frequently recalled by the psalmist when he finds himself crushed by enemies and turning in desperation to God:

In the day of distress I cry out to the Lord;
I groan and am discouraged.
...Will the Lord reject me for ever?
...But then, Lord, I remember your great deeds.
You led your people like a shepherd with
Moses and Aaron as their leaders. (Psalm 77)

We have every reason to follow the same pattern in our prayer with those who are oppressed today.

The Bible offers many instances of prayers of desperation said by people setting out on an apparently hopeless task of resistance to oppression. These can be a source of inspiration and a model for our own prayer.

Among the more striking examples are the prayers of two brave women, Judith and Esther. Judith 13:5-7; Esther 4:19: 'O God, whose strength prevails over all, listen to the voice of the desperate...' And the final prayer of Samson, Judges 16:28. Other notable prayers of desperation are to be found in the two books of the Maccabees (I Maccabees 3:51-3; II Maccabees 13: 10-12) and in the Book of Daniel (3:40).

The presupposition of all of these prayers is that God is actively involved in directing the course of human history, that His saving power is exerted on behalf of the poor and the weak.

It is important to note, however, that God's answer to the prayer of the desperate is hardly ever a direct miraculous intervention. Rather, the prayer is answered by a strengthening of the person's own courage and determination.

One of the best correctives for a fatalistic or escapist conception of providence is familiarity with these biblical stories and prayers. If we model our prayers of thanksgiving on Mary's song of praise (Luke 1:46-55), then we will be inculcating a correct understanding of divine providence. It will inspire people to take responsibility for their lives and to work to overcome evil in society.

Once the poor become active in the struggle for justice, it could be very useful to borrow some of the charismatic techniques of prayer. For instance, when a few people are about to lead a protest march, the group could impose hands on them, and pray for courage and protection.

There are times, too, when it would be opportune to pray for healing of various kinds. For example, when 'the security forces' use violence against protestors,



people are likely to suffer not merely from bodily injuries, but also from deep resentment. Such resentment gnaws at the human spirit and deprives people of inner freedom; so it is good to pray that they be healed of it.

In praying with those who are poor and desperate, one might well use a version of the Lord's Prayer, expanded to apply to their situation:

"Our Father....May you Kingdom come, and may we be active in promoting it, a Kingdom of peace and love, founded on true justice...

Give us this day our daily bread and strengthen us in our efforts to build a world where we all have the opportunity to earn our bread through meaningful work, where nobody has to go hungry, and no group lives in luxury while other starve.

Forgives us our trespasses -- our failure to believe in your Kingdom and your call to us to bring it about, our sinful apathy in the face of injustice, our failure to work together, our dissipation of energy in fruitless resentment rather than courageous challenge.

Lead us not into temptation: do not test us beyond our strength by leaving us in our desperate situation. But, deliver us from evil: lead us out of bondage as you led your people in the past out of slavery and into the Promised Land; raise up leaders for us as you called Moses and Deborah, Judith and David; inspire and strengthen them to lead us into freedom."

BIBLICAL WISDOM

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor; to comfort all who mourn.

Isaiah 61:1-2

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

PSALM FRAGMENT

To the upright, I will show the saving power of God. *Psalms 50:23*

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Pray that we may always treat the oppressed with the dignity that they deserve. Pray that we may always be God's instrument in promoting the true spirituality of Providence to all those we encounter.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Pray together The Lord's Prayer. It may be helpful to read the two versions from Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11: 2-4

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ After reading this article, try following the suggestion and 'expand' on the traditional version and make the "Our Father apply to the present situation." Can you share this 'new' prayer with the group?
- ◆ Have you ever been 'prayed over'? Have you ever 'prayed over' another? As part of many CDP and/or parish rituals, the congregation extends their hands and prays over an individual or a group. How did it feel to be the receiver or the giver in the specific situation?
- ◆ Read the suggested biblical selections about Judith, Esther, Samson, Daniel and Maccabees. Notice that their prayers are answered by the individual's courage and determination -- not by direct miraculous intervention. If we model our prayers of petition and thanksgiving on these, then we will inculcate a correct understanding of Providence. Relate a situation when actions as well as prayer were needed.



The Role of Providence in Crisis and Healing

Mary Hogan, SP

God does not directly will our suffering. God's will for us is for good. God created us out of love, created us human and free. Given the human condition in which we exist, we carry in our very nature the roots of disease and death.

Being imperfect and finite creatures, we are subject to all the ills that could possibly happen from failure, loss, weakness, sickness and suffering right up to death. However, God does not directly will or take pleasure in our sufferings or illness.

Sickness and death are the effects of our human condition, and are as much a suffering to God as they are to us. But, given that God is not responsible for illness, the cancer, the accident, the unfortunate circumstances, we may still ask why does God not step in and change the patterns?

Karl Rahner reminds us that one of the mysteries of God's presence is that God created us and redeemed us out of infinite love, but created us human and free, and being human we are subject to every human weakness and every human failing.

We do not often consider what it means to be human, any more than we stop to think about our heart beating continuously or the steady and essential exchange of oxygen as we inhale and carbon dioxide as we exhale. When these processes are momentarily interrupted or overburdened, we do consider their function.

When something happens in our life that is beyond or outside our control, we begin to realize what it means to be limited, weak and human.

One basic underlying dynamic of being human is that we are not always in control, and we struggle to be in control. We live within that tension.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

2 Corinthians 12:9

PSALM FRAGMENT

Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; All day long foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

Psalm 56:2-3

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What questions or complaints do you have for God as a result of experiencing suffering and disappointments? (Be honest!)
- ◆ Do you still hang onto anger about how "the Church," or someone in the Church treated you in the past? How could your belief in the Providence of God help you to release that anger?
- ◆ How has God's Providence been revealed to you in times of exile and alienation?

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Pray for the most vulnerable among us that the heart of humanity will overflow with compassion and wisdom.

Pray for your family and friends that they will be receptive to how interdependent and vulnerable our bodies, minds and spirits are.

Pray for the grace to be able to turn to God in anger and sorrow, to bring all that we are into God's loving presence.

Pray that "vulnerability" will be experienced as a strength beyond understanding the strength of the Spirit in us.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Allow me to be gentle with myself. Allow me to savor my humanness and my limitations. Allow me, Holy One, to fall into your arms.



Darkness/Light

Reflection: Christmas

Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.

In the 2,000-plus years that have unfolded since that night in Bethlehem, can anyone claim that the darkness has diminished? Is there any less pain, any less meanness in the human spirit, any less heartache?

“The light shines in the darkness,” writes John. And, maybe that’s the thing. Maybe that’s the gospel writer’s point. It is not that the light obliterates the darkness; it is simply that the light is there.

This, I think is the message of the incarnation -- the story behind the story that we will tell each other this day. God enters into the darkness to sit alongside of us as a Providential presence -- God with us -- Emmanuel.

God refuses to dwell in the heavens above and, from a safe distance, watch the drama of human life play out. Instead, our Provident God climbs right into the darkest places to be with us; and in that holy and luminous action, we find reason enough to hope.

When Robert Louis Stevenson was a little boy, he lived in a house on a hillside in Scotland. Every evening he would watch the lamplighter walk through the streets in the valley below lighting each of the village street lights. “Look Mother,” he would say, “here comes the man who punches holes in the darkness.”

As women and men of Providence, we are called to be light in the darkness, to be a Providential presence. We are called to punch holes in the darkness. We punch holes in the darkness when we find ways to bring the light of ourselves to the dark places of our world.

Punching holes in the darkness is what the candles that burn in our windows symbolize. They are

- candles of hope to overcome despair,
- candles of peace to dispel discord and violence,
- candles of joy to dissipate sadness,
- candles of courage to ease all fear,
- candles of love to uproot hatred.

A number of years ago, I was invited by a friend to make a retreat in a small, out of the way, “holler” in rural West Virginia. At night, we would sit on the porch watching the sky darkening and the shadows coming on. It was fascinating. The house was high in the hill above a small town. First there would be one light. Then the minutes would pass and another light, then another. A trail of light wound its way below us, around, in and out. I watched wondering what was it and how it was created. My friend smiled and said, “Ah, you’ve noticed. We are still poor and a little bit backward here.” That is the lamplighter, walking through town, lighting the gas lamps.”

As I recall those lamps being lit, I am grateful for so many Providence people like your selves who day after day -- not just at Christmas -- punch holes in the darkness. We know them -- you -- by the trail of light left behind. Truly, you are the light shining in the darkness.

(With extensive borrowing of words and ideas from Megan McKenna, John Shea, and a sermon entitled “Luminaria” by Dr. Scott Black Johnson.)



Darkness/Light continued

BIBLICAL WISDOM

The light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it.

In part from John 1:1-18

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Pray for those who are missed in being touched by the light. The news prompts naming individuals and groups who need touched by the light. What stories in the news come to mind?

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ In what ways do the painful conditions that confront our planet -- ecological degradation, war, poverty, homelessness -- challenge us to rethink our understanding of Providence? People punching holes in darkness? Give examples.
- ◆ How would encountering God, in the darkness of our world, help one to become holy? Recall another in your life who is holy. Recall the life of Jesus, Gandhi, Joan Chittister, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa or one of the saints.
- ◆ As light surfaces in the holes punched in the darkness, "trails of light are left behind." At work, with family members, in our community, name "trails of light left behind" that you have noticed and been grateful.

PSALM FRAGMENT

Though the darkness covers much of the land and violence seems to flourish, love gives birth to dazzling light...it shines through all that is hidden.

Psalm 92:7-8, Nan Merrill

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Where there is darkness, light

Amidst the darkness in our hearts, the sin of violence, our self-hatred, our fear, our hostility toward one another, our oppression of the poor, our rejection of You; let Your light shine -- the light of peace, joy, trust; the light of truth; the light of resurrection; the light of hope. Let us be like Christ, the light of the world, pointing to Your presence, showing each other how to live justly, humanly, nonviolently, so that our light, Your light, will shine for all, and one day we see You face to face.

John Dear, S.J



Making God's Providence Visible Through Our Giftedness-Part 1

Ellen Rufft, CDP, Ph.D

Marie de la Roche Assembly, Part 1, August 2003

This morning, I'd like to share with you my reflections on the theme for the Assembly, our giftedness, our mission, and on the challenges we face as we attempt to make God's Providence more visible in our world. What I think is important is that my remarks and the questions that we'll discuss will stimulate your thinking and energize all of us to more concerted action for those most in need of experiencing the Provident love of God.

To speak of the gifts of our Province, is to speak of plentitude. We have many, many Sisters and Associates who give generously of themselves in a great diversity of ministries. We have among us more degrees than those on any thermostat. We have individuals with excellent health and an abundance of energy.

We have Sisters willing and capable of being in leadership -- on Provincial Council, on committees, on the Consultative Body, in internal ministry, in our Circles of Collaboration. We have aging Sisters and those with dwindling health who provide a powerhouse of prayer for us. As a Province, we are truly blessed.

Like many religious communities in the United States, we have moved from the dependence that characterized our lifestyle in pre-Vatican II days through the period of sometimes excessive independence to on-going efforts toward interdependence. Two years ago, with the creation of Marie de la Roche Province, we took a huge step in our community history. We decided to combine our gifts, to pool our resources, to become one interdependent entity. And, the impetus of our decision was the mission. We came together because we believed that God's Providence could be made more visible by our becoming one.

Today begins a new moment in our history. Today, this moment, is what theologians call a "kairos" moment, a unique moment characterized by an urgency and a challenge to respond unlike any other time. It is the fullness of time. Now is the moment when, as a new Province, we are called to determine how we will carry out the "why" of our coming together. What does it mean that we have joined for the sake of the mission?

In his book, "A Presence That Disturbs," Fr. Anthony Gittins, a social and theological anthropologist, tells us that "the origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God literally brought down to earth to continue God's mission. Mission is what God does for a living: reach out, gather in, embrace, reconcile, unite, heal, uphold, renew. Mission is not just about our ministry, it is about our whole life.

The new Archbishop of Boston, Sean O'Malley, told a story at his installation about a secretary at a different chancery office who answered the door one day and found a scruffy looking man who claimed to be Jesus Christ. The secretary wasn't sure what to do, so she went to the Bishop and asked him. He replied, "Look busy."

After the audience laughed at that response, Archbishop Sean explained that in truth, what we are all called to be doing at every moment, being busy about the mission of God, believing that Jesus can show up as easily in the schizophrenic man at our door at home as he can in the pastoral visit that is part of our designated ministry. The Archbishop was saying in different words, that God's mission has us. We are to live in service to it.



The urgent challenge which faces us now as a new Province, in this kairos moment, is to decide how we will use our combined gifts to strengthen our desire and our ability to carry out the mission of Jesus.

If we have truly joined together for mission, how do we want to be together in a way that's different from two years ago? What do we want to be doing together to make God's Providence more visible in our world that we could not do or were doing as three provinces and a region?

BIBLICAL WISDOM

Come to me, you who desire me.
Ecclesiastes. 10:18

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

◆ Name and claim “kairos” moments in your life. What was the outcome? What were the insights and perhaps changes?

◆ Mission is what God does for a living. Gittins suggests, “that we do not have a mission, but instead, that mission has us.” To say this, implies that like God, it is our life, to reach out, gather in, embrace, reconcile, unite, heal, uphold and renew. Mission is about our whole life. How is this true for you? How has this concept grown in you from your early years until now?

◆ As a community of believers, Associates and Sisters, how can we use our combined gifts to carry out the mission of Jesus? What do we want to do together to make God's Providence more visible?

PSALM FRAGMENT

No one is like You, God. All of creation belongs to You. For You are great; we are awed by the wonders of Your world.
Psalms 86

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

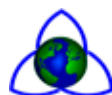
Pray for your faith community so that we may live believing that the origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God brought down to earth to continue God's mission. Pray, too, for each of us here present that we might live in a generous way, realizing that the mission has us. Pray for our Sisters and Associates who have died, those who embody our God, source of all mission. Pray for family members and friends who have asked for prayers. Add your intentions aloud....

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Eye of Love

When we look at the world with God's “eye of love,” we see that: we humans are children of a loving God who invests utmost confidence in us; we are brothers and sisters, not strangers or enemies: all else on the face of the earth is God's gift given to all of us for our common good and our responsible stewardship: the greatest among us is the one who serves the rest: we “find” our lives by “losing” them in love of God and love of neighbor; hostility and hatred are healed through forgiveness, not retaliation and revenge; the world's destiny is decided -- it is not in doubt -- it is the Kingdom of God in which all tears are wiped away and we rejoice together, as a family, around the Banquet Table of the Lord.

James L. Connor, S.J.



Making God's Providence Visible Through Our Giftedness-Part 2

Ellen Rufft, CDP, Ph.D

Marie de la Roche Assembly, Part 2, August 2003

There is an ancient Yiddish word which describes how one feels when someone she loves achieves success in an important endeavor. The word is "kvell." To kvell is to vibrate with pride and joy. Parents kvell at the graduation ceremonies of their children; loved ones kvell when one of the family members receives an honor. Kvelling is about sheer happiness. As a Jewish friend explained to me, "In kvelling, there is no negative. It is uncomplicated joy!"

Perhaps our first task as Providence people is to kvell. We ought to be professional kvellers, vibrating with wonder and gratitude at the greatest gift we have been given, the grace to know the God of compassion.

We are God's loved ones, God's family. We need to kvell daily at God's success -- at the wonders of creation, at God's indiscriminate graciousness toward every creature in every time on every planet, at God's seeming inability to give up on anyone. The reasons for kvelling in the presence of the God of compassion are endless for those who are in love.

And, we are called to do more than kvell the One we love. We are called to imitate the kind of compassion that characterizes our God. It is a compassion that excludes no one. It stretches to encompass the oppressors and the oppressed.

We are called to give the gift of compassion to those who are poor, oppressed, or vulnerable, but we have also committed ourselves through our mission statement to be compassionate to those who batter women and children, to the tortured and the torturer, the abused and the abuser, to the Sister or Associate who is judged and criticized and to the one who criticizes. To imitate the compassion of God trusts us beyond all human descriptors of one another which divide us toward a love that embraces all created beings.

It is, of course, no easy task to use our individual and combined gifts to make God's Providence more visible in our world. Many challenges face us as we commit to kvelling God's compassion, as well as to imitating it.

We have been invited and encouraged to be attentive to the needs of the time and to respond to them through our ministries from our foundation days, as well as through the many General and Provincial Chapters after them. Sr. De la Salle's opening remarks at the 1985 General Chapter are as appropriate today as they were then. "We live," she said, "in a world of ambiguities. On the one hand, there is rank materialism, godlessness, intellectual pride, contempt for life, political and moral corruption, on the other is increasingly convincing signs of the action of the Holy Spirit. It is in the context of this world that we must determine the authenticity of our choices in response to the Gospel mandate to bring the Good News to the poor, to manifest God's love to all whom we encounter."

We, too, live in a world of ambiguities. We are bombarded daily with news of violence, wars, and terrorism. We are inundated with enticements to buy, to own, to have more and better. We are programmed toward individualism and competition; perhaps the greatest American sin is to be a loser.

We live in a country in which 41 million people have no health care; where almost 2 million people are in prison, 42 % of them African American; a nation where more than a billion dollars is spent on weapons every day. We live in a world of massive



poverty, racism, and environmental degradation in which 1.2 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.

On the other hand, technology has connected people to information and to one another in ways barely imagined even a decade ago. Advances in medicine have contributed immeasurably to the health and longevity of millions of people. The new cosmology, ecology, and multi-cultural awareness have increased our understanding of the interconnectedness of all creatures. With Sr. De la Salle, we can truly say, this is the world to which we must bring the Good News of God's Providential care.

Perhaps the contemporary poet, David Whyte, describes our age the best. He writes:

This is not the age of information.
This is *not* the age of information.
Forget the news, and the radio and the blurred screen.
This is the time of loaves and fishes.
People are hungry, and one good word is bread for a thousand.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

We gather to pray, believing that God, Source, Empowerer, Breath and Enlivener, prays in us. We pray rejoicing in who we are and in who we are together as we kvell a friend who brings joy to the world. We rejoice in the wonder of who God made us to be, wonders of God's creative power, each allowing full expression of God in our loving. We pray for those who have no one to pray for them. Offer prayers aloud....

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ Kvellung is about sheer happiness. When in your life did you "kvell" on another's behalf? What emotion did you experience? When have you experienced being kvelled?
- ◆ As Providence people, we ought to be professional kvellers. At work, what would kvelling look like in relating to others?
- ◆ If you were God, how would you arrange the world regarding suffering? As it is? With only bad people suffering? Some other way?

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Perhaps kvelling brings Peace. This prayer of Peace was written by Yannis Ritsos following World War II during the Greek Civil War, translated from Greek by Kimon Friar

PSALM FRAGMENT

Let your Word be known to the nations, your Glory to our children's children.

Let the grace and gentleness of the Holy Spirit be upon us, guiding our feet upon paths of Love; increase the Light within us -- O Beloved, hear our prayer!

Amen

Psalms 90



Mary's Visit to Elizabeth

Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.

Mary at Cana offers an example of a contemporary image of the Mother of Providence -- one who gives voice to the need and directs us to listen to the Word -- to determine a way to respond to the need. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth, known as the Visitation and found only in Luke's Gospel, offers us an example of those who compose and proclaim a Providence canticle providing the first strains of a melody that will find its full orchestration in the life and ministry of Jesus, who is God's Providence made visible.

The story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth begins in haste, an expression of her joy, her faith and her gratitude. The Greek term *spoude*, which can be translated as "haste," carries with it the idea of eagerness, diligence and enthusiasm. On this journey, the first of three she undertakes to Jerusalem, Mary is alone and pregnant as she travels the 90 miles from Nazareth (tradition says) to Ain Karim, five miles south of Jerusalem -- a journey of three or four days.

Mary sets off because the angel tells her that an older cousin, Elizabeth, is six months pregnant. This is the only passage in the New Testament that establishes a family relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). But, as is always the case in Luke's writings, it is not blood ties that are important, but faith ties. Luke will demonstrate what close relatives Mary and Elizabeth are in the community of their belief.

Mary goes to meet Elizabeth, who is the first woman encountered in Luke's Gospel. She is identified primarily in terms of the relationships in her life: with her husband, Zechariah; her cousin, Mary; and her son, John. Little is said of Elizabeth, yet what is mentioned reveals a woman of deep faith who cooperated with God's plan.

The initial description is that she is righteous. She is the only woman in the New Testament called righteous. She comes from a priestly family, a daughter of Aaron who was the brother of Moses and Miriam.

Elizabeth means 'God is my treasure.' But, Elizabeth is an old and childless woman, far beyond the childbearing age. This would have counted her among the poor, in that her worth and her hope would have been measured by children, and she has none. Barrenness was thought to be the woman's fault, a punishment for sin or at least of God's forgetting the woman. More than just a biological fact, however, this is also a theological comment about the lack of possibility and the lack of a future.

The fact that Mary was not yet married suggests that she, too, can be viewed in terms of social and cultural weakness, in a position akin to that of Elizabeth. It has been noted, that the meeting of a pregnant crone and an unmarried, pregnant bride suspected of adultery is powerful and potentially empowering.

These two have been identified with a remnant in Israel referred to as the *Anawim*. The word comes from the Hebrew, which refers to the poor, the humble and the afflicted. But it is these that God protects, defends, saves and rescues. God's preference is for the *Anawim* -- whether as an individual or as a group.

The greeting of Mary and Elizabeth is one of the most poignant encounters in Luke's Gospel. Fittingly, in the Eastern Church, the feast of the Visitation is called the Embrace or the Kiss. The icons depict Mary and Elizabeth warmly, fondly embracing each other. The Spirit in the early Church was called "the kiss of the mouth of God," and these two believers kiss ecstatically and embrace one another. The Visitation



scene is entirely focused on the two women. What is especially to be noted is that, according to Luke, the first person besides Mary to whom Jesus' messiah-ship is revealed is a woman, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's greeting to Mary is especially significant. She makes the first and only Christological statement by a woman in the Gospel. Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth greets her as the "mother of my Lord." Thus Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, makes a prophetic statement. The women immediately express the overflowing sentiments of their hearts. Elizabeth speaks a dual beatitude, in a loud voice, she pronounces Mary blessed. Her blessing has its roots in those of the Hebrew women, Deborah, Jael and Judith. Elizabeth's exuberant praise joins Mary in solidarity with a long heritage of women whose creative actions, undertaken in the power of the Spirit, brings liberation in God's name. This blessing weds her historic pregnancy to her faith, depicting her as someone who hears the word of God and acts upon it, even in her own body.

Mary is blessed not so much because she has a physical relationship to Jesus, but that she has a more intimate, spiritual one. She is the "mother" in that she first heard God's word and believed it. As the Lucan disciple, Mary hears God's word, ponders it, keeps it in her heart and brings forth its fruit.

Luke then tells us that the infant John leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. This detail also has Old Testament roots -- the twins Jacob and Esau leaped and played in Rebecca's womb (Genesis 25-22). The Greek word for leap is *skirteo*. It is found only in Luke, twice in reference to John's leaping (1:41-44) and once in reference to Luke's beatitude about persecution: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven" (6:23).

In response to Elizabeth's greeting, Mary responds with the canticle we know as the Magnificat. This is the longest passage put on the lips of any female speaker in the New Testament. The Magnificat is the great New Testament song of liberation.

The liberation is personal, social, moral and economic. It is a revolutionary proclamation of intense conflict and victory. It praises God's liberating actions on behalf of the speaker, which was paradigmatic of all of God's actions on behalf of marginal and exploited people.

Mary's song is the "program of the reign of God" which will be echoed in Jesus' program proclaimed in the synagogue in Nazareth. Mary stands in the long Jewish tradition of female singers from Miriam (Exodus 15:2-21), to Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and Judith (Judith 16:1-17) who also sang dangerous songs of salvation.

Composed according to the overall structure of a thanksgiving psalm, which first praises God and then lists the reasons for gratitude, the song is generally divided into two strophes: vv. 46-49 center on what God has done for Mary, and vv. 50-55 center on what God will do in society.

When we consider the two parts of the Magnificat together, we see that a parallel is suggested between God's powerful mercy for one lowly girl and the way that God acts through time and society. Mary's story is presented as the emblem of a much larger experience and expectation.

Some scholars posit that the Magnificat should be rightly seen as Elizabeth's song, to parallel the Benedictus that is attributed to Zechariah. Whoever it is attributed to, it is clear that it very closely resembles the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). In both, there is emphasis on praising God for lifting up the lowly and feeding the hungry. The Greek behind the English word for lowly is not simply talking about humility, but about poverty.

We have here a vision of concrete freedom from systemic injustice from oppression by political rulers and of the arrogant and rich. In the transformed social order that is celebrated, food is provided for the hungry. The spiritual realm is understood as embedded in the socioeconomic and political reality. Focus is on the might,



holiness and mercy of a Provident God who has promised solidarity with those who suffer and who is true to those promises.

The Magnificat is not the song of a victim, but of one who proclaims liberation with certain authority. The entire narrative is subversive of the typical structures in the world and a call to the Church to participate in this subversion. This is a call to live out the implications of accepting a God whose self-definition is in terms of the weak and oppressed, who has chosen to work in the world among lowly handmaids and barren women. The Magnificat's message is so subversive that, for a period during the 1980s, the government of Guatemala banned its public recitation.

This is a call to acknowledge by the way we live that the values and powers of this world are not the values and powers that matter most. It is a call to view the world in terms of God's perception of worth and value, by particularly valuing those who have been marginalized by society, by culture, even by the Church. In short, it is a call to make a preferential option for the poor, because that is what the God of Providence does, and this is the way that we make God's Providence visible. And, the poor are entitled to make claims upon us, upon our time, upon our resources.

This truth was brought home to me just recently. Sister Elena Almendarez and I, who have fostered 25 children over a 12-year period, have spent these last few days transitioning a baby we've cared for the past 10 months to his new home with a single mom who is financially lacking much. So, as we packed his clothes and his toys, we also prepared to send a car seat, a stroller, a high chair, about 30 cans of formula and nine boxes of cereal, along with assorted jars of baby food.

I was feeling good about the way we were sending him off and feeling that we had been very generous. When I told the new mom what we were sending, her response was, "Do you have any Pampers?" I was stunned, unsettled. Didn't she realize all that we were giving her? How many other foster parents would just send the kids off as they came, with nothing?

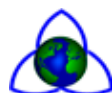
But upon further reflection, I discovered that she was right. She was entitled to all that I had to give, because I had it, and she didn't. She needed it, and I didn't. We could easily afford to supply her with all that she needed. It wasn't a matter of being generous, it was a matter of being just.

Our Provident God chooses to be indiscriminately loving and indiscriminately compassionate to all of us, but especially to those on the fringes, to those on the outside, to those who have not merited, to those who do not seem worthy, to those who have not paid their dues, to those who have not worked hard, to those who are disruptive, to those who don't even try, the list goes on and on, to include warmongers, the batterers and the abusers, because they need it the most.

In their time, Mary and Elizabeth were numbered among that fringe population, the poor, the lowly, the *Anawim*; and the God of Providence dwelt among and within them. They sang a canticle of praise and thanksgiving that the God of Providence did great things for them, that the God of Providence was with them, poor and lowly.

With the proclamation of the Magnificat, we hear the strains of the kind of reversal that will characterize Jesus' ministry that he announces in the synagogue at the beginning of His ministry. He here proclaims that the Spirit has anointed him to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18)

Significantly, as Sandra Schneider has noted, "The more scholars of the social world of Jesus study his historical teaching and praxis, the clearer it becomes that one of the most original features of Jesus' life and ministry was his universal compassion expressed in a nondiscriminatory ministry and an inclusive table fellowship that broke through the purity boundaries of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, economic class, physical condition and even sinfulness." This is the concrete way that Jesus was God's Providence made visible; we are called to be the same.



These brief reflections of Mary in two familiar Gospel settings have perhaps portrayed her in a slightly different light. If we return to the initial question, “What, specifically would it mean to explore the figure of Mary in relationship to the God of Providence?” I think we can conclude that Mary at Cana is an advocate, a voice for the community who speaks from within the community. At the scene of the Visitation with Elizabeth, she is counted among those who are disenfranchised, marginalized. In both cases, Mary makes God’s Providence visible by her actions on behalf of others who are needy and by her presence in solidarity with those who are poor, as she is poor.

Elizabeth Johnson sees Mary as a friend of God and a prophet. As a friend of God, Mary enters into a mutual relationship with the God of Providence, caring passionately about what God cares about, allowing God’s presence to be the foundation of her life. As a prophet, she makes God’s Providence visible as she raises her voice against injustice, speaking out and acting in the service of God’s reign, comforting others with her presence.

Mary, Mother of Providence, walks among us today in the persons of many women and men of Providence. She is among us wherever there is a place of welcome and tender regard. She is among us when we see the needs of our brothers and sisters and give voice to those needs and become advocates. She is among us as we live in solidarity with those who are disenfranchised and marginalized. She is among us whenever and wherever we take the initiative to make God’s Providence visible.

There is a story of a tribe in Africa in which the art of true intimacy is fostered even before birth. In this tribe, the birth date of a child is not counted from the day of its physical birth or the day of conception. For this tribe, the birth date comes from the first time the child is a thought in the mother’s mind. Aware of her intention to conceive a child, the mother goes off and sits alone under a tree. There she sits and listens until she can hear the song of the child that she hopes to conceive.

Once she has heard it, she returns to her village and teaches it to the father so that they can sing it together as they make love, inviting the child to join them. After the child is conceived, she sings it to the baby in her womb. Then she teaches it to the old women and the midwives in the village so that throughout the labor and at the miraculous moment of birth itself, the child is greeted with the song.

After the birth, all the villagers learn the song and sing it to the child when it falls or gets hurt. The song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the child is grown. And at the end of life, loved ones gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the next passage of life.

The song that Mary heard, pondered, hummed and sang throughout her life was the same theme her child just couldn’t get out of his head. That familiar refrain was sounded again and again in his life. It was the tune Mary hummed climbing the hills, covering 90 miles of sacred land to visit Elizabeth. It was in the air that set the little baptist leaping and womb dancing. It was the melody that accompanied Mary once again across the land from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was the lullaby that she crooned as she rocked the child in the cave in Bethlehem. It was the harmonious angel’s canticle that resounded over the Judean hills and stirred the shepherds from dreamy sleep. Years later, the feisty verses an adult son proclaimed in the synagogue promising liberty to captives, release to prisoners, sight to the blind, were an echo of the descant his mother sang on a hill three decades earlier, heard then only by an old woman and two unborn children. His lament in Gethsemane’s garden was a recapitulation of the conception fiat she uttered as she was overshadowed by the Spirit. The dirge that companioned her as she walked home that night he was murdered and buried was her heart’s anthem throughout that desolate Saturday when it suddenly crescendoed into Easter’s alleluia.

Throughout those 30-plus years, the land heard the song. Its rhythm and cadence



reverberated across the Judean hills and Jordan's valleys. The land heard, and the land remembered, figuratively and literally, For, as the physicists tell us, no sound is ever lost. The sound continues as long as there is a medium to receive and translate the vibrations.

Our gathering of Women of Providence in Collaboration calls us to listen to the sounds, to the songs, to the cries of this land that we call home. Our ears and our hearts must be attuned to hear the sounds and to hear the song that was sung by the people before we were born. As we learn the song, may the Spirit overshadow us that we, too, might feel stirring within us, that we, too, might add our voices to the acclamation that shatters the forces of oppression.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

Luke 1:39-55

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ Spend some time reflecting on the Magnificat. As noted, verses 46-49 center on what God has done for Mary, and verses 50-55 center on what God will do for society. Take some time and compose your own Magnificat. Be ready to share some of your phrases with the other group members.
- ◆ Sister Michele commented that for a period of time, in the 1980s, the government of Guatemala banned the public recitation of the Magnificat because its message was so subversive. This prayer is a call to view the world in terms of God's perception of worth and value. It is a call to make a preferential option for the poor, because this is what the God of Providence does and that is the way that we make God's Providence visible. Mary made God's Providence visible by her actions on behalf of those who were needy and by her presence in solidarity with them. Mary is among us today in the persons of women and men of Providence, whenever and wherever someone takes the initiative to act on the message of the Magnificat. Do you agree that the poor are entitled to make claims upon us, upon our time, upon our resources?

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Women's voices, women's witness
being faithful through the years.
Living lives of dedication,
finding hope amid the tears.
God, you made us in your image,
from your womb you gave us life.
With this life we give you service.
Serve your people, show your grace.

Women's witness of the ages
has persisted through the pain.
Tell the stories of our mothers,
let us sing their songs again.
Women's voices of the future
speak of visions yet unseen.
Tell the stories of our daughters
filled with wonder, hope, and dreams.

Tell of visits to two women,
one a virgin, one grown old.
Yet to each there came a promise
of a gift by God foretold.
Tell us one who shared her water,
left replenished from the well.
Tell of women that first Easter
to whom Christ said: "Go and tell."

Celebrate the faith of Anna
and the loyalty of Ruth.
Stand with Naomi and her sisters
seeking justice, speaking truth.
Join with us in Sarah's laughter,
raise your voice in Miriam's song.
Women's voices, women's witness,
showing women they belong.

Women's Voices, Women's Witness
Manley Olson
Women's Rites by Diane L. Neu

PSALM FRAGMENT

Read the Magnificat
Luke 1: 46-55



Providence and Presence

Lucy Zientek, CDP

Providence Event 2003 has given us the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between Mary and Providence. In particular, we have been invited to reflect on her as the Mother of Divine Providence in the context of the wedding feast at Cana. Have you ever wondered what the wedding feast at Cana might have been like if Mary had not been invited? Would the failing wine still have occasioned Jesus' first miracle? Would Jesus have even been among the guests?

We can only speculate about how things may have turned out for all concerned had Mary not been at that wedding. But, as women who understand that "it is the quality of our presence that effectively allows Christ's love to be felt by others," it is important that we reflect more deeply on the significance of her presence -- a presence that always evokes, through the love of Christ, a new manifestation of God's Providence for all in attendance.

The Church gives us the foundations for honoring Mary at Cana under the title of the Mother of Divine Providence through texts of the Divine Liturgy. Noting that a Mass in honor of the Mother of Divine Providence is found in the collection of Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Michele Bisbey, CDP, remarks: "Of particular significance is the fact that the Gospel in this Mass is that of Cana (John 2:1-11), and the preface, usually the most theological of all the Mass texts, makes explicit reference to Mary's intercessory role with her son at Cana for the bridegroom and bride. *It extends this role to Mary's state in heaven, where she provides for the needs of the Church.*" [italics added]



Thus does the Church not only ask us to consider Mary as the Mother of Divine Providence in the context of her presence and actions at Cana, but through the language of the preface, we are given as well a direction in which we can pursue our reflection: What needs of the Church today might she seek to provide for through her continued intercession? In other words, can we learn something about the practical significance for the Church today that Mary is the Mother of Divine Providence? And more particularly, since she is invited by the Church itself through its liturgical texts to the Eucharistic celebration, we find ourselves encouraged to ask: What difference might the Mother of Divine Providence make for us by her presence at our feasting table?

As noted previously, the Church would have us reflect on Mary under this title using John's Gospel passage describing the wedding feast at Cana. To do so, we will follow the simple methodology of Karl Rahner, SJ, whose opening remarks in a theological meditation on Mary as "Mother of the Lord" raises two key questions:

Mary is the virgin mother of Jesus Christ. The meaning of this statement, and the fact that it says everything about her, becomes clear, if one considers whose mother she is and what way she is his mother?

Although Rahner considers Mary under a different title, it is of note that he begins by situating her son, "the Lord," in the broader context of the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and the world. Rahner notes that God creates the world not only for its own goodness, but also in order that God may communicate God's very self to it. This communication finds its true end in those personal, spiritual beings made in the image of God who are capable of receiving God's reality.



In Jesus, the Word of God is made flesh, and God can now share life with that world in a personal way. All things have been created with that end in mind, says Rahner. Such was God's plan from the beginning. Aquinas and others would name that plan God's Providence.

Of course the plan isn't quite that simple. Human beings can freely receive or reject this offer of relationship with the divine. And, we have the capacity to shape and nuance our responses, as well as to offer or withhold them at any given moment. In other words, implicit to God's plan is dialogue. In its root dynamic, Providence is dialogical, and so we can expect that our response or lack thereof makes a significant difference with respect to how, when and where that Providence is made manifest.

As Marie McCarthy, SP, observes: "Providence is not the mystery of a God who plans everything, handing it down to us creatures. Providence is, rather...the mystery of dialogue and relationship in which divine activity and human response are joined. Providence is the mystery of the ongoing, enduring relationship between the God who makes all things possible and us creatures, handiwork of the creative activity of God – creatures made in God's image and likeness, creatures who are themselves creative."

Given that the human-divine dialogue is a constitutive element of the plan, is it any wonder that we find the Mother of Divine Providence at the fulcrum of the conversation that makes the difference for all concerned at Cana? At first calling Jesus' attention to the fact that the wine had run out, she remains undaunted by his seemingly less than encouraging response. By enlisting the assistance of the waiters, in effect she re-opens the dialogue with her son and even changes the situation somewhat by procuring whatever help she can for him. By not letting the matter drop, the Mother of Divine Providence expresses not just her faith in Jesus, but also a faith that there are always possibilities in a situation that have yet to be considered.

Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP, points out: "Providence is basically a dynamic relationship. Providence is God's way of relating to creatures that encourages their creativity and sustains their hope...God lovingly proposes plans or possibilities which creatures are free, to a greater or lesser degree, to accept or reject. This is Providence as persuasion. To accept and implement lures is really to add to the sum of actuality and thereby contribute to the divine joy; this is to co-create."

Finally, Mary instructs those who serve the table to "do whatever he tells you." Here the Mother of Divine Providence invites them to join her in a stance of openness. Offering her son no suggestion as to how to handle the situation, still she fully expects something to happen.

And, why not? The very presence of an infinite, indivisible and loving God-with-us means that there are always limitless unimaginable possibilities open to creation for its goodness and its growth. She thus has every reason to be optimistic!

Whose mother is she? She is the mother of the one who is made manifest when we love, live and work with what we have available to us in a stance of openness to the God of infinite possibilities. The Mother of Divine Providence knows this is the "plan" because she lived it. Knowledge of Divine Providence, like all knowledge of mystery, must come through the personal, lived experience of that mystery.

What is the practical significance for the Church today that Mary is the Mother of Divine Providence? Do we find that she still intercedes for the needs of the Church today from her state in heaven?

Surprisingly for this writer, our reflection on Mary of Cana, in the context of her title as Mother of Divine Providence, leaves us wondering: Has she led us to a place of dialogue? Has she suggested to the Church, which itself has invited her to be present at our feast, that there are always possibilities in a situation that are still to be considered? Does she ask us to stand with her in a place of openness?



Will Mary of Cana, the Mother of Divine Providence, again prevail upon her son (whose first reply to her was that his “hour had not come”) and engage those who serve the table and instruct them to follow the one who ultimately charges them to bring the jars filled with water (image of our baptism) and take them to the chief steward? Will the chief steward be surprised to find wine of exceptional quality?

Will the wine flow once again, freely and with great joy, at our wedding feast? She is expecting something to happen.

And, why not? For the very existence of an infinite, indivisible and loving God -- the presence of Providence -- means that there are always limitless, unimaginable possibilities open to creation for its goodness and its growth!

BIBLICAL WISDOM

John 2:1-11 -- The Wedding at Cana

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ For many years, thoughts about God’s Providence seemed to focus on “accepting” all that God had planned and arranged for us. Recently, the theology has changed to the concept of dialogue and relationship between God and God’s creatures becoming more pro active. When have you personally or communally been more pro active in making God’s Providence more visible?
- ◆ How does having a stance of openness further the concept of praying and trusting that all my works depend on God, while taking action as though all my labors depend on myself?
- ◆ Also, the presenter in her conclusion offered some additional questions for consideration that may be used.

PSALM FRAGMENT

Guide me, O Beloved, that I may become spiritually mature; Love me into new life!

Psalm 140, Nan Merrill

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Pray for women, mothers, friends and girls so that each might live their lives in fullness of being made and loved in God’s image. Remembering parents who suffer the loss of children through death, may healing be theirs. We bring to prayer.....

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Provident God
How boundlessly you bless,
how generously you give,
how completely you love,
how faithfully you provide,
how tenderly you understand,
how fully you forgive,
how endlessly you invite,
how willingly you welcome,
how lovingly you cherish,
how compassionately you shelter.

The riches of your presence
exceed my largest dreams.
The fullness of your kindness
expands beyond my experiences.

Unreservedly you display your riches.
You freely offer all of them to me,
a banquet of daily nourishment,
plentiful food to fill my hungry soul.
I have only to come to the table
to receive from your abundant feast.

Prayers of Sophia, Joyce Rupp



Prayer Reflection

From 40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister, published by Augsburg Books.

Prayer is neither a passive nor an empty act. On the contrary, prayer ‘works.’ The only problem is that when we pray, we get what we seek. What we want out of prayer determines how we go about it.

If we want security and protection, we say suffrage prayers; if we want serenity and enlightenment, we meditate; if we want immersion in the mind of Christ, we immerse ourselves in scripture. Prayer is not one kind of activity, it is many. It nourishes the spiritual life. It also reflects it.

When we are young [religious], we ‘say’ our prayers. When we get older [in religious life], we ‘go to prayer.’ But, when we begin to see prayer as the undergirding of life, the pulse of the universe in the center of the soul, we become a prayer.

As Gandhi says, first we have words and no heart. Finally, we grow into a heart without words. The truth is that the way we pray says something about what we believe about God and about what we believe about life itself.

To the monastic mind, prayer is the marking of time and the pursuit of the known but unseen, the fulfilling but unaccomplished. Those qualities mark the prayer life of a monastic community in form and substance.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Mark 11:24

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ In what ways have you experienced that ‘prayer works’?
- ◆ Is praying a ‘religious’ activity or does it transcend religion?

PRAYER FOR TODAY

May my heart expand without words into the silence of your love.
Anoint me, Divine One, with the wisdom of the unseen.

PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Send prayers out to all creation, that our belonging to God will become more than an activity in us; that it will be the pulse of the universe itself.

Pray for the ability to pray without ceasing, to have your life ‘become a prayer.’

Pray with your whole heart and whole soul for your loved ones, for life itself.



Providence Blessings

May Providence be with you in **strength**, holding you in strong-fingered hands, and may you be the sacrament of God's strength to those whose hands you hold.
May the blessing of **strength** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **gentleness**, caressing you with sunlight and rain and wind. May God's tenderness shine through you to warm all who are hurt and lonely.
May the blessing of **gentleness** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **mercy**, forgiving you, beckoning you and encouraging you. May your readiness to forgive calm the fears and deepen the trust of those who have hurt you.
May the blessing of **mercy** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **wonder**, giving you wide-open eyes for seeing the splendor in the humble and the majestic. And, may you open the eyes and hands and hearts of the blind and the deaf and the insensitive.
May the blessing of **wonder** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **compassion**, holding you close when you are weary and hurt and alone. And, may you be the warm hands and the warm eyes of compassion to those who reach out to you in need.
May the blessing of **compassion** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **simplicity**, opening you to a clear vision of what is real and true, leading you deeply into the mystery of childhood. And, may your dealings with others be marked by the honesty which is simplicity.
May the blessing of **simplicity** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **patience**, waiting for you with outstretched arms, letting you find out for yourself. May God's patience with all the young and all the old be your patience.
May the blessing of **patience** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **peace**, stilling the heart that hammers with fear and doubt and confusion. And, may the warm mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled or anxious.
May the blessing of **peace** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **love**, drawing you close as you tremble at the edge of self-gift. May God's love in you light fires of faith and hope and inflame the earth.
May the blessing of **love** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **joy**, filling your heart to fullness. And, may you spread joy wherever you go.
May the blessing of **joy** be on you.



Litany of Divine Providence

Loving God who manifests your love through the heart of Jesus...**We Praise You!**

Loving God who delights in our salvation...**We Praise You!**

Loving God, you have chosen Mary to be the mother of Jesus and the Church...**We Praise You!**

All Provident God, hope of all those who have lost hope...**We Trust You!**

All Provident God, our confidence and hope in times of doubt and confusion...**We Trust You!**

Because you entrust to us the message of the Gospel through a sharing in the spirit...**Your Providence be praised!**

Because your constant fidelity bring us out of the darkness of sin into your redeeming light...**Your Providence be praised!**

Because all wonderful people and precious things come from your hand...**Your Providence be praised!**

For calling us to a life of service in your Spirit...**We thank you Lord!**

For giving us our families, relatives and friends...**We thank you Lord!**

For the gift of yourself and the joy of being loved by you...**We thank you Lord!**

For the witness and prayers of all the saints...**We thank you Lord!**

For our sins and the sins of all...**Forgive us Lord!**

For our failure to do good...**Forgive us Lord!**

Father, care for those who have the responsibility of leadership...**In Jesus' Name, amen.**

Father, give to all of us the fidelity to seek you forever...**In Jesus' name, amen.**

For your continuing presence with us...**We thank you, all Provident God.**

We exalt your Providence, O Lord...

and we commit ourselves to making your providence more visible in our world.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we stand in awe before Your greatness and marvel at your providential love, which you so generously give each of us through your son, Jesus. Inspire us through your spirit to share with all, a love like unto yours and assist us in all of our undertakings in your service, so that all may know, as we know, that You are Love. This we ask through Jesus, your beloved, and his spirit who dwells within us. Amen.



To BE Providence

To be Providence
in our world is to prepare
to take with and to leave behind,
to seek the Reign of God actively,
and to find the treasure in the
Community of persons that surrounds us.

To be Providence is
to allow our hearts to be changed,
to be poor in spirit,
to know we need loving, caring mutuality,
to allow our needs to move us, and
to grow in Love.

To be Providence is
to know forgiveness,
to be merciful, and
to allow ourselves to let go of hurt, pain,
vengeance, getting even, over and over
again and again.

To be Providence is
to be pure of heart,
to be genuinely surprised by the gift of
each person and of each day.

To be Providence is
to be a peacemaker,
to find peace deep within who we are,
and all we believe.

To be Providence is
to be Holy,
to allow our desire for the Reign of God,
to overcome our fear of moving on, and
to yearn for a gentle heart, and
for God and Providence in abundance.

To be Providence is
to be humble,
to acknowledge equality,
to live in freedom from anger and envy.

People of Promise,
People of Providence,

May our lives be a blessing on all who
have had the opportunity to know us
well.

May we look to the future with the same
faithfulness, with expectation of prom-
ise, with awe of Providence.

May our willingness to change in our
work and ministry, in living, in everything,
be an example to those in need of help.

May our faithful love be a source of
strength to those in need of that extra
measure of love.

May our willingness to be Beatitude
People be a source of joy to those
around us.

May we always, and in every way,
celebrate the gift that is Providence.

May we continue to be true to God's
work in our lives, so that others may hear
of the God of Love, the God of Mercy,
and the God of Justice.

May we continue to grow, struggle, and
be found to have lived our faith out loud
so that we may gift our world with a
sense of love that is an echo of
PROVIDENCE!

Author unknown

