

Reflection for Golden Jubilee September 8, 2018

Donna and I welcome you and wish to thank you for your presence with us for the celebration of our Golden Jubilee. Your support today and throughout our lives as Sisters of Divine Providence has helped us to unfold the Providence of God.

As Kathleen and I were praying with Scriptures for our Jubilee we resonated with the Visitation story. We remembered, from our Postulant days, Sister Miriam Therese Winter's song "The Visit" which describes Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth. **We would be more than happy to sing it for you! We know all the verses!** John Dear, SJ in his book **Mary of Nazareth, Prophet of Peace**, invites us to consider the Visitation Story as a call to service and loving-kindness, choosing to place the gifts and insights of our prayer into loving action for others. It is a Scripture that touched both of our hearts and it is challenging. What touched our hearts over the years as we pondered the Visitation story?

The Gospel story of the Visitation is a witness to us of the intergenerational support, love and bonding that was evident between Mary and Elizabeth. It also illustrates for us our call to live community. In reaching out in love to Elizabeth, Mary deepened the bonds of community with her.

Donna, how do we understand Mary?

Mary is a young devout Jewish girl. God surprises her with the news that she is to bring forth Jesus into the world. Yes, she was alarmed at the invitation to be the Mother of God, pondering how this is happening to her as she confidently spoke her **YES** ~ while not really knowing what her **FIAT** would mean. In her saying YES to be the Mother of God, Mary is venturing on uncharted territory.

Mary was just beginning her life's journey and when it was revealed to her that Elizabeth was also pregnant, she knew in her heart she needed to be present to her. So, she set out, on foot **"in haste"** from Nazareth to Ein Karem, a journey of at least 80 miles! Did we ever wonder why Mary "went in haste" to visit Elizabeth?

We believe we can find the answer in Mary's desire to be **present** to Elizabeth and be of loving service and support to her. For Mary, her physical **presence** was the best gift she was able to offer her cousin at this time.

Kathleen, share with us how we understand Elizabeth?

Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, was a prayerful, faith-filled woman. She was a humble and wise woman long into her life's journey. Elizabeth and Zechariah were from a priestly class of people, but chose to live more simply devoting their days to God in prayer.

Elizabeth, elderly and barren, was fully aware of the cultural stigma not to bring a child into the world. Her life and reputation changed when God fulfilled her desire for a child and chose her to bear a son in her "old age".

Elizabeth's spirit exudes with blessings upon seeing Mary! Blessed is she, who believed, that the promise made her by our God, would be fulfilled!

Mary, steeped in Scripture, upon greeting Elizabeth responds "My soul magnifies the Lord" and she sings about the future days of reformation in which the marginalized, the poor and the hungry will be raised up. Mary exults that God's reign of peace, justice and love will come about in future days.

As Elizabeth Johnson points out in her book, “Truly Our Sister” their encounter happens in spacious silence. “The outpouring of the Spirit on Elizabeth and Mary happen in traditionally female domestic space. Women are the actors who hold center stage; women are the speakers who powerfully convey the resounding good news; women themselves embody the mercy of God which they prophetically proclaim. And they do so in the context of meeting and affirming one another.”

With that being said, Donna, what does the Visitation Story mean for us today?

The Visitation story certainly reveals to us that “**our God is the God of the impossible.**” We hear the invitation to live in the wonder and awe of our God who is full of surprises!

Have we been surprised at the way our God lured us, and continues to lure us into being? Absolutely, as we have been open to **Providence Unfolding** in our lives. God indeed has surprised us and gifted us to **be** the women we are today.

Just as Mary and Elizabeth name the grace working in their lives, Kathleen and I can name the grace that worked in our lives. It is the relationship with each of you as it mirrors the relationship of our loving Triune God. We have been strengthened by the presence and fidelity of our Provident God, our Sisters and Associates in community, our family and our friends.

Also, implicit in today’s Gospel is Mary’s and Elizabeth’s trust in God! They remind us of our Foundress, **Marie de la Roche**, who trusted deeply in Divine Providence. We grew to know in our hearts, through others, how to live our particular charism of “**trust in and openness to the Providence of God.**”

Our second reading from Philippians reminds us to put on the mind of Christ Jesus. **We cast our lot with women who did just that!** Our Sisters faithfully educate young children, mentor adults, nurse the sick, welcome the stranger, selflessly minister as “foster mothers”, provide shelter for the homeless, care for God’s creation and now, we are welcoming refugee families until they are able to be self-sustaining. We continue to hear the call to love each other, be a voice for the voiceless and to embrace anyone marginalized, abandoned or suffering. Our founder, **Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler**, challenged us to justice-making, just as Mary proclaimed in her Magnificat!

With the joyful hearts of Mary and Elizabeth Donna and I give thanks for 50 years of providential living. From our earliest Community days to the present, we can say we came with a **YES** in our hearts, wondering how our life would unfold, what our life would mean, and, at the same time, filled with a newness of God’s Promise and the excitement and energy to **bring Christ to the world ~ and to be Christ for others.**

The wisdom we have gleaned has been both a gift and a blessing! We have come to know how blessed we are as we are embraced by God’s loving Providence and are strengthened by the bonds of inclusive community. We are filled with hope for a future yet unseen!

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we seek to live as Jesus did and we strive always for “that mind which was in Christ Jesus.” We are **compelled** to make God’s Providence visible, and we commit ourselves, together with you, to choose life, live in mystery, risk with hope, and birth our future in Providence.

Together we proclaim,

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.”