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“When we feel loved, we are moved to go out to others”

In his 5 February general audience, Pope Francis continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, for the Jubilee of 2025, speaking about the visitation and the Magnificat.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will contemplate the beauty of Jesus Christ, our hope, in the mystery of the Visitation. The Virgin Mary visits Saint Elizabeth; but it is above all *Jesus*, in His mother's womb, who *visits His people* (cf. *Lk 1:68*), as Zechariah says in his hymn of praise.

After the astonishment and wonder at what has been announced to her by the Angel, Mary gets up and sets out on a journey, like all those who are called to in the Bible, because “the only act with which man can respond to God who is revealed to him is that of unlimited readiness” (H.U. von Balthasar, *Vocation*, Rome 2002, 29). This young daughter of Israel does not choose to protect herself from the world; she does not fear dangers and the judgements of others, but goes out towards other people.

When we feel loved, we experience a force that sets love in motion; as the apostle Paul says, “the love of Christ impels us” (2 *Cor* 5:14), it drives us, it moves us. Mary feels the push of this love, and goes to help a woman who is her relative, but also an elderly woman who, after a long wait, is welcoming an unhopd-for pregnancy, difficult to deal with at her age. But the Virgin also goes to Elizabeth to share her faith in the God of the impossible and her hope in the fulfilment of His promises.

The encounter between the two women produces a surprising impact: the voice of Mary, “full of grace,” who greets Elizabeth provokes the prophecy in the child the older woman is carrying in her womb, and inspires in her a dual blessing: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (*Lk* 1:42). And also a beatitude: “Blessed are you

who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (v. 45).

Faced with the recognition of the messianic identity of her Son and her mission as mother, Mary does not speak of herself but of God, and raises a praise full of faith, hope and joy, a song that resounds every day in the Church during the prayer of Vespers: the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55).

This praise to God the saviour, which gushed forth from the heart of his humble servant, is a solemn memorial that synthesizes and fulfils the prayer of Israel. It is interwoven with biblical resonances, a sign that Mary does not want to sing “out of the choir” but to tune in with the forefathers, exalting her compassion for the humble, those little ones whom Jesus in his preaching will declare “blessed” (cf. *Mt* 5:1-12).

The prominent presence of the paschal motif also makes the *Magnificat* a hymn of redemption, which has as its backdrop the memory of the liberation of Israel from Egypt. The verbs are all in the past, imbued with a memory of the love that lights up the present with faith and illuminates the future with hope: Mary sings of the grace of the past, but she is the woman of the present who carries the future in her womb.

The first part of this canticle praises God's action in Mary, a microcosm of the people of God who adhere fully to the covenant (vv. 46-50); the second ranges from the work of the Father in the macrocosm of the history of His son (vv. 51-55), through three key words: memory, mercy, promise.

The Lord, who bowed down to the humble Mary to fulfil "great things"

in her and make her the mother of the Lord, began to save His people starting from the exodus, remembering the universal blessing promised to Abraham (cf. *Gen* 12:1-3). The Lord God who is the faithful for ever, showered an uninterrupted stream of merciful love “from age to age” (v. 50) upon the people loyal to the covenant, and now manifests the fullness of salvation in His Son, sent to save the people from their sins. From Abraham to Jesus Christ and the community of believers, the Passover thus appears as the hermeneutical category for understanding every subsequent liberation, up to that realized by the Messiah in the fullness of time.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord today for the grace to be able to wait for the fulfilment of every one of His promises; and to help us to welcome Mary's presence

in our life. By following her example, may we all discover that every soul that believes and hopes “conceives and begets the Word of God” (Saint Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke 2, 26*).

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