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Meditations: 22

December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we await the Child Jesus' arrival at Christmas.

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- Mary's gratitude
- God assists our desire for Him.
- From gratitude to generosity

MARY HAS WALKED with haste to reach Elizabeth and Zechariah's home. On arriving, she sees that

everything the angel had told her is true. She had firmly believed it, but seeing her cousin expecting a child fills her with joy. What she already senses in her heart is confirmed: the presence of the Messiah. Her overflowing joy is felt even by John. We can imagine the Baptist, now in his mother's womb, anxiously awaiting the moment to proclaim the good news. John eagerly announces it to his mother, who for the moment is the only one who can hear him.

Mary too was eager to share the immense joy that filled her heart. When greeting Elizabeth she quickly realises that her cousin already knows everything. The Mother of Jesus breaks into song and, in her praise, weaves together the history of Israel with words she has so often read in Holy Scripture. God's love for her is so great that she doesn't know how to give expression to it. Our Lady has to borrow words from God

himself, as we too so often do in the Church's liturgy. Mary quickly redirects Elizabeth's words of praise to the author of so many marvellous deeds. Her whole life will be directed to this goal: to bringing people to God.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (Lk 1:46-47). Mary is overwhelmed by how God acts and makes use of her: *For he has looked on the humble estate of his handmaid (Lk 1:48).* Mary senses God's special look of favour and this conviction leads her to give thanks.

MARY HAD CERTAINLY NEVER DREAMED of finding so much favour in her Creator's eyes. She realises that God in his immense goodness is pouring out his gifts on her for no other reason than divine freedom itself. We cannot get over our astonishment. It is hard for us to

imagine that God could be so generous towards us poor creatures.

But because of the experience of sin, we may sometimes feel somewhat distanced from this gratitude. For we cannot forget that “the gift of a capacity to perceive God seems as if it is withheld from some. And indeed, our way of thinking and acting, the mentality of today’s world, the whole range of our experience is inclined to deaden our receptivity for God, to make us ‘tone deaf’ towards him.”^[1]—

We shouldn’t be disturbed by this difficulty. Saint Thomas Aquinas reassures us that “so marvellous is God’s grace and love for us, that He has done more for us than we can grasp.”^[2]— That is, although our receptivity to Him may be diminished, God’s grace goes far beyond this and comes to our assistance.

God reaches out to each of his daughters and sons with all the ardour of his love. “He didn’t wait until we were good before he loved us, but gave himself freely to us ... And holiness is nothing other than safeguarding this gratuitous gift.”^[3] — To be holy is to let oneself be loved by God in this way, because He ardently wants it, and for no other reason. As Saint Josemaría once said, using words that may at first surprise us: “With Faith and Love we can drive God crazy. He becomes crazy once again – he was crazy on the Cross, and he is crazy every day in the Sacred Host – pampering us like a Father does his first-born child.”^[4] — Mary realises that her joy will be proclaimed for all generations, and this gratitude gives rise to her self-giving.

A GRATEFUL HEART readily gives rise to desires for generous correspondence. Only when we let

our heart react with gratitude can we attain true happiness and total commitment in returning love for love. We can never give back to God anything proportional to what He has given us. But this inability in a way frees us. Our very self-giving is the work of the One who *has done great things for me* (Lk 1:49), because He is all-powerful and can draw out of us what initially surpasses us. *His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation* (Lk 1:50), from Abraham right up to today, to our own life, so ordinary and hidden from many people.

God likes to show forth the might of his arm and thus confound those who think their own strength and will-power is enough to be happy. God has deigned to destine the humble, the little ones who allow themselves to be made great, for the highest places in his kingdom. He will bring to nought any throne built

by human hands. God wants to fill those who realise they are needy with good things, the first of which is his unconditional and infinite Love. He is determined to outdo our imagination and surpass our most optimistic desires.

But sadly, God will not be able to fill with his treasures those who feel rich without being rich. And this will cause Him great sorrow, for He longs to fill all his children with his Love. But such is the story of his mercy, of his tender affection for each one. It is the story of the freedom of a God who offers us all his joy from generation to generation, who continually seeks ways for us to let ourselves be loved. Mary, with her *fiat*, has achieved this like no one else, and she will be overjoyed to teach and accompany us along the way.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 December 2009.

[2] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Creed*, 1. c., 61.

[3] Pope Francis, Homily, 24 December 2019.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Instruction*, 19 March 1934, 39.

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