

Meditations: 21

December

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

- Mary sets out in haste to the hill country
- Gratitude for God's goodness
- The joy of those who believe

MARY AROSE AND WENT with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah (Lk 1:39). Mary senses that her cousin needs her and sets out in haste. How fortunate Elizabeth was to have such a relative: so willing, so

sensitive, so open to the needs of others. *Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:43). Perhaps we too can address our Lord with a prayer like this: why am I so fortunate to know you, Lord, to be able to converse with you now, to have you in my soul? We ask Saint Elizabeth, who received the first visit of the incarnate Messiah, to help us to thank God for his tender mercy towards each one of us. And we too, like Our Lady, are eager to go out in haste to share this gift with many souls.

Elizabeth was deeply moved when her cousin arrived. And she felt the Holy Spirit filling her heart with his love. From the very beginning of the new covenant, God pours out his grace into the souls of those who allow themselves to be caressed by him. The Gospel tells us that Mary was full of grace and that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. How

marvellous is the human heart's capacity to contain God! Saint Josemaría was overwhelmed by the greatness of a Creator who wants to be so close to us: "How great you are, and how beautiful, and how good! And I, what a fool I am, pretending to understand you. How little you would be, if you could fit in my head! You fit in my heart, which isn't little."^[1]

FACED WITH THE GREATNESS of the mission they have received, these two cousins don't shrink back in fear. They don't let themselves be carried away by the fear of failure or by anxiousness. They trust God completely, and are grateful. They see themselves inundated with God's gifts and give thanks, without giving too much importance to the difficulties or to what will happen in the future.

This is how we see these two mothers: serene, joyful, grateful. They know they are loved by God and this spurs them to go beyond what is humanly reasonable. Mary and Elizabeth are eager to carry out what God wants. Their children, each in a different way, are going to mark a before and after in mankind's history. They don't worry too much about how this is going to happen; they are convinced that God will do it all. "Blessed are you for believing, Elizabeth said to our Mother. Union with God, supernatural life, always brings with it the attractive practice of human virtues. Mary brings joy to her cousin's home, because she 'brings' Christ."^[2]

For Elizabeth, the silence of her husband Zechariah was also a source of grace. It probably made her pray more, to ask God directly for the meaning of his plans. Closely united, Elizabeth and Zechariah prepared

quietly for John's coming. This made it easier to keep superficial things from obscuring the great mystery of redemption that was opening before their eyes. They had been chosen to be relatives of the Messiah, and that was enough to fill their hours of continuous dialogue with God.

BLESSED ARE YOU among women (Lk 1:42). This is possibly one of the most frequently repeated phrases in history. We say it in every Hail Mary, together with all believers of all times. And the years have confirmed that Elizabeth wasn't wrong. Those who trust in God are happier. The only promises that are sure, that are not precarious, are God's. As in Mary's vocation and also in Elizabeth's life, we see that joy has an important source: John leaps for joy in his mother's womb at the presence of Jesus.

We too would like to overflow with joy all the time. We would like to feel even physically Christ's presence, his nearness. Certainly Saint Elizabeth had prayed for many years before these events. Perhaps she had already assumed she would be childless. It was then that God intervened in her life, making her the mother of the greatest of those born of women (cf. *Mt 11:11*). This is what God is like and this is what he does in our own lives. Where we seem to be lacking is where he blesses us. Where we fail to reach, he fills with his grace. Where we surrender to his Providence, we see that his plans are the best possible. "God comes down freely. His love is non-negotiable: we did nothing to deserve it and we will never be able to repay it."^[3] —

Who could have imagined six months earlier that her cousin would be the mother of the Messiah and

that she would be the Precursor's mother? How often our faith is tested by adverse circumstances or by our desire to consider all the variables and future possibilities. We can ask Elizabeth and Mary to help us to give thanks with their same joy. *Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:43).

^[1] Saint Josemaría, Preaching Notes, 9 June 1974.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, 566.

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