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Commentary on the Gospel: Our Lady's Zeal

Gospel for the 4th Sunday in Advent (Year C), and commentary.

(Lk 1:39-45)

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry,

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Commentary

In the Gospel of Saint Luke, the Visitation comes immediately after the Annunciation, since this is the way things actually happened. Some commentators point out that our Lady probably sensed in Saint Gabriel's greeting an invitation to assist her older cousin. “And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this

is the sixth month with her who was called barren” (*Lk* 1:36). This explanation seems convincing, and Mary's decision provides us with a good reason to meditate on the spirit of service.

But this is not the direction we are going to take in our commentary. Rather we are going to focus on the phrase “with haste,” a translation of the Latin expression *cum festinatione*. Why do we do things “with haste,” that is, without delay? The most powerful reason is certainly love or affection. When we truly love someone, we do whatever affects their well-being quickly, overcoming any laziness. In contrast, a “lukewarm” love or affection finds many excuses to delay anything that requires effort.

It can be useful here to put ourselves in the Virgin Mary's place, in order to better understand her way of acting.

What has just happened? Saint Gabriel has communicated to her the most amazing news in human history: that the Incarnation promised by God and announced by the prophets is finally going to take place, if she agrees to it. And by answering *fiat mihi*, “be it done unto me,” the Word became flesh in her most pure womb. If we think about ourselves, what is our tendency when we hear good news, something we have wanted to see happen for a long time? In general, we try to find the privacy needed to fully savor what we have been told. What did our Mother do? “Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country” (*Lk* 1:39).

In order to prepare well for the great feast of Christmas, it would be good to consider frequently our heavenly Mother in the coming days. For our Lady’s love and zeal are the antithesis of any lukewarmness. The

latter frequently involves following our Lord “from afar,” like Saint Peter on the night of Holy Thursday (cf. *Mt* 26:58). But we know that in Mary’s case *Dominus tecum*, “the Lord is with you,” and not at a distance or afar. Lukewarmness also usually brings with it a great inner emptiness. Instead, our Mother is *gratia plena*, “full of grace,” with no room for any kind of emptiness. Lukewarmness is also often compared to a fire that is dying out, because it is not being fed well. In contrast, our Lady’s heart is enkindled, burning with an ardent love. Therefore, for these reasons and probably many more, Mary went with haste to serve Elizabeth and fulfill God’s will.

What resolution can we make on this 4th Sunday of Advent, with Christmas fast approaching? To try to carry out our ordinary duties with an ardent love for God and those

around us. And if we realize that certain corners of our heart have cooled down, let us remember the following point in *The Way*: “Love for our Mother will be the breath that kindles into a living flame the embers of virtue hidden in the ashes of your indifference” (no. 492).

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