

“...why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” (*Luke 1:43*) This excerpt from the greeting of Elizabeth to our Blessed Mother in today’s Gospel should resonate in our hearts at every mass. Every time we come into Our Lord’s Eucharistic presence in the tabernacle, after all wasn’t Mary the first Tabernacle? Wasn’t she the first communicant, the first to receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ? Wasn’t she the first one to hold him in repose? Elizabeth’s reaction and greeting makes sense to us as we see this wonderful story unfold in the Gospel.

But then, who are we that the Lord should grace us with his presence? What makes us worthy of such an honor? Even more astounding, who are we that we are permitted, no that is a poor choice of words, that we are invited, no invited isn’t strong enough, that we are encouraged to the point of begging to spend time in Adoration of the Eucharist? Who are we that we receive the same level of support in order to prepare our souls to receive Our Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist? Who are we to be able to join with Mary and receive the real presence of Jesus Christ into our bodies and our souls?

How do we respond to God’s amazing generosity? Are grateful for God’s gift of his Son in our presence, in our hearts and souls as he becomes one with us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist? Or do we take him for granted just like we take having the lights go on when we flip the switch or the water flow from the tap when we turn the faucet. We take these things for granted until a hurricane or a flood hits and then we are indignant when we are denied our comfort for a few days while men and women toil 24/7 sometimes risking their lives so we can have power, water and of course cable TV.

Clean water, reliable electricity and entertainment in our homes are gifts that are not accessible to two thirds of the world’s population. In many of the places members of this parish have served, clean water is a dream, electricity in the home a fantasy, and TV beyond imagination. As destitute and remote as these places are, we still find Catholics. Priests and Religious are present, the Mass is still celebrated and the Eucharist is distributed to the faithful. The big difference is that the people who live in these places don’t take God’s real presence for granted.

How do we fight through our apathy? How do we battle against taking the gifts we have been given, particularly the gift of the Eucharist for granted? How do we continue to imitate Elizabeth's wonder, why has all of this been granted to us? Once again Mary our mother shows us the way.

In the poetry of early Christianity, it was said that Mary conceived through her ear, heart and womb. She heard the words of the Lord from Gabriel, she pondered them in her heart, and moved by the Holy Spirit, and with her fiat she took action conceiving the Word in her womb. *(Adapted from "The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers, The Relentless Widow"; John Shea)*

During the Baptism of a child in the Church this prayer is said over the ears and the mouth. "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen"

We are fed by the Word through our ears every time we come to Mass, listen to Scripture, particularly the Gospels, and listen to the preaching by the Bishop, Priest or Deacon. Once we have been fed, we like Mary are called to action. Our first action is to pull the Word into our hearts and break it open, to reflect on what has been said and how it impacts our lives. Then moved by the Holy Spirit we need to follow Mary in her second action, the one we see in this Gospel reading. We need to take action to serve others.

Mary undertook a perilous journey to visit her cousin for a myriad of reasons, but primarily because Elizabeth was an elderly pregnant lady who had no one to help her and she needed assistance with the chores, the cooking and the other requirements of everyday life.

Every one of us has numerous opportunities every day to be moved by the Holy Spirit and take some small action to help someone else. It can be as small as opening a door or as large as providing means so they can support their family. In over 99 percent of the time, we can take these actions without any risk to our persons. If it is so easy, then why don't we respond when prompted?

I think it is because we have become so accustomed to being served, that we have forgotten how to serve. We are so accustomed to just saying gimme, and having someone respond that we have forgotten how to say please and thank you.

We have become callous and cold in our daily interactions with everyone except a select few and we don't even recognize our bad behavior. We have become ungrateful for the many blessings that have been showered upon us, freedoms unheard of in most of the world, clean water, plenty to eat, transportation, safe homes, entertainment, and the list goes on.

It even carries on and into our prayers. Just take a moment and reflect, in all of the favors that we ask for from God, outside of formal pre-formatted prayers that we recite like 'Grace Before Meals', how often do we pause just to say thank you to God for the many blessings that he has bestowed upon us? Our internal response too often is crickets.

Being grateful to God for his many gifts in our lives is essential. A few weeks ago we read the story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers in Luke's Gospel. (17:11-19) 10 lepers were cured, but only 1 came back to say thank you. Do you remember Our Lord's response? He said; "Stand up and go, your faith has saved you."

We are in the same situation as the lepers every day. We need something and it is provided, often without us even asking and we just keep on with our day without a thought or even recognizing the gift that has been provided. But the leper who returned to give thanks to God for his gift? He received the promise of eternal salvation. In the act of giving thanks, the leper, we, open our hearts to God and that effort allows the Holy Spirit to take action within us.

I'm not advocating that we shouldn't petition God and ask him to help us with our needs. We need to keep knocking on his door with our problems or they will never be solved. On the other hand, if you have a friend and the only time he ever speaks with you is to borrow \$5.00 for lunch every day before payday, how long is that person going to be your friend?

We start by being grateful in our prayers, before our petitions, not as an after thought at the end. We must be sincere in our gratitude to God, and avoid just paying lip service like a 3 year old that just received their Tootsie Pop from Father after mass. We need to express our gratitude, our sincerity, in action. How do we do that? By following Mary's example in action to help our fellow man, or in other words, circle back to page 2 of this homily. And don't worry; I won't go over it with you again, well at least not today.

So, was Mary grateful? Of course she was, listen to the beginning of her response to Elizabeth. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed, the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.” *(Luke 1:46-49)*

In a few days we will celebrate the Birth of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In the mist of the trees, carols, excited children and wrapping paper strewn about we need to pause in wonder; who are we that the Son of God should come to earth for us? Then let us take some time to give a gift to the Christ Child, the gift of just saying thank you on Christmas as well as every other day for the many blessings that he has showered upon us, particularly the gift of our faith and his Eucharistic presence.