

Novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart - 31 August to 8 September 2019

OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

Day 2: Sunday, 01 September – 22nd in Ordinary Time

- Sirach 3: 17-20, 28-29 (Call to gentleness and humility)
- Psalm 67:4-5, 6-7, 10-11 (In your goodness O God, you prepared a home for the poor)
- Hebrews 12: 18-19,22-24 (But what you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God...you have come to God himself...and to Jesus the mediator who brings a new covenant)
- Luke 14: 1,7-14 (For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the man who humbles himself will be exalted...When you have a party invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind...)

MARY: MOTHER-DISCIPLE – COMMISSIONED BY GOD

Welcome to the second day of our Novena. Yesterday, we met Miriam, the mother of Jesus, in her historical context. We saw that she was a poor woman, belonging to a poor family, living in a poor village. She was part of an occupied nation whose people were politically and socially marginalised. Our readings today confirm what Pope Francis says often, that the poor, people like Miriam, have a special place in God's heart (cf EG 197). In the psalm, we praised God for in his goodness, he prepared a home for the poor. In the Gospel, Jesus tells his host to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind – those who are not able to repay him for his invitation - so that God himself will repay him. With this affirmation of the special place of the poor in God's heart, we hear the call to humility, both in the first reading and the Gospel. Pope Francis says “how I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor!” Jesus expresses it more radically – “Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted!” These words of Jesus in the 14th chapter of Luke remind us of one of the canticles we read in the first chapter of his gospel – Mary's song of praise. And Mary said...

“My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant,
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

In Mary, we see a humble one who has been exalted by God. Yet, in her song, she also tells us that this is not only true for her, it is true for others as well because this is what our God is like, our God is a God of justice and compassion...

“He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly,
He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.”

No wonder, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the Magnificat as “*at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might say, the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung.*” Bonhoeffer further says “*This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out*

*here.*¹ We are not surprised by this anymore because we met this woman yesterday, and the woman we met was not a “gentle, tender, dreamy Mary” but a strong hardworking woman who was not a stranger to poverty, violence and social dislocation. It is this Mary who, in her ordinariness was chosen and called by God! And she, in her poverty and humility, said YES to God’s call. Allow me now to reflect with you on God’s call and Mary’s response.

Thirteen chapters before today’s gospel reading, we read the story of the Annunciation (Lk 1: 26-38). Elizabeth Johnson, an American theologian, observes that in this story “Luke deftly combines two conventions of biblical narrative, the birth announcement and the commissioning of a prophet” and says “Luke’s artistry welds the announcement of Jesus’ birth to the call of Mary as a woman commissioned by God.” For Johnson, “the announcement of Mary’s impending motherhood is at the same time her prophetic calling to act for the deliverance of her people.” She is Mother-Disciple! In her call to become mother of Jesus, she also received her vocation to be His disciple. As we read this story again, we look at Mary as a woman commissioned by God and with her as model, may we learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus today.

The angel Gabriel came to her and said “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God.” When I interviewed applicants to our congregation, one common sentiment I heard was “why me?” Why is it me that God has chosen? My sisters and my friends are much better than I am! Why did God choose Mary? Maybe in our minds the answer is clear, because Mary was perfect, not like any other! But is this how God chooses? In yesterday’s reflection, we saw that Mary was very much like others, quite ordinary. I would not be surprised if Mary asked the same question our applicants ask – why me. If we read the Lukan text carefully, we see that the answer to the question does not lie in Mary, it lies in God. Why has God chosen Mary - because God found favour in her, because God decided to choose her and God’s act of choosing brought about the blessing! It is not the other way around. It is not that she is blessed and so God chose her, rather, it is that God chose her and therefore she is blessed! We consider ourselves. We do not need to be perfect in order to find favour with God, we do not need to be sinless for God to love us. God’s love, God’s choice, God’s call – this is not earned, it is freely given! We know this. In his letter to the Romans (5:8), Paul says “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” I believe that in His love for us, God chooses and calls each one of us for a mission. God’s choice and call make us blessed. Mary had a unique mission, it was to be the mother of Jesus. I believe that God has also gifted each of us with a unique mission. What is your unique call? What is your unique mission?

In Luke’s narrative, we see the young Mary afraid. She does not understand. Again, she is not very different from us. Fear and confusion - she experienced these too. She asked “How can this be?” The angel assures her “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you.” I read in this statement as a promise of empowerment and protection. The Holy Spirit will come upon you. Your mission will not be easy but do not be afraid, the Holy Spirit will empower you. When Jesus sends out his disciples, he said to them “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves...do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say...for it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Mt 10:19). When God calls us for a mission, God also assures us of his presence. God assures us that it is his love and his strength that will sustain us in our mission.

¹ From Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Advent, 17 December 1933, London.

Although she still did not understand fully the implications of God's call she said "Yes." I believe her fear was still there and yet she said "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Our poor humble woman, is also a woman of courage – one who is able to say Yes even in her fear!

Sisters and brothers, like Mary, each of us is unconditionally loved by God. Each of us has been chosen and called to participate in a unique way in Christ's mission of loving. Like Mary, we are afraid for we know that this mission can bring us in the midst of wolves. But like Mary, God assures us that the Holy Spirit will come upon us and that the power of the most high will overshadow us. Like Mary, may we also have the courage to say Yes!

Let me end this reflection on Mary's discipleship and ours with the beautiful assurance from today's second reading, the reading from the second letter to the Hebrews:

What you have come to is nothing known to the senses: not a blazing fire, or a gloom turning to total darkness, or a storm, or trumpeting thunder or the great voice speaking which made everyone that heard it beg that no more should be said to them. But what you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... You have come to God himself... and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant!

As we gather for this Eucharistic Celebration, we come to God himself; we come to Jesus the mediator who brings the new covenant. Let us follow the example of Mary, the humble courageous one. Let us transcend our fears and allow her 'YES' to live on in each of us.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Mother-Disciple - pray for us