



Then and Now

Catholicism is a physical as well as a spiritual religion. It is about things that happened and things that happen in and through human bodies, in particular places such as Bethlehem or northern New Jersey, and in certain times such as the days of King Herod or December 2024. Our Faith is about the Word becoming flesh. It is centered on One born of a woman, born under the Jewish Law to save us, through the offering of His body once and for all.

The ministry of Jesus is to human bodies. He opens eyes so that they see, ears so that they hear, and He loosens tongues so that they speak. The Visitation to Elizabeth is about bodies: pregnant bodies, a kicking fetus, sounds reaching ears, and mouths speaking. Elizabeth hears, believes, and proclaims. For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears – why doesn't she just say – when I heard you? Elizabeth ... cried out in a loud voice – why doesn't it just say, she said?

These elaborate expressions draw our attention to her hearing and speaking and show that it is a hearing and proclamation of the Gospel. Faith is established in Elizabeth through physical events: her meeting with Mary, their conversation, John the Baptist leaping in her womb. The spirit is working through the physical - then and now.

Elizabeth praises Mary, it has become part of the "Hail Mary." Later in the gospel, another woman shouts out words of praise for Mary, blessed is the womb that bore you. To which Jesus replies, blessed rather those who hear the word of God and keep it. Happy are those who hear and practice the gospel.

The Word is to be received and believed in the life we have – here and now – in the relationships, experiences, and commitments that are ours, here and now. We do not need to look for a future incarnation of ourselves, where we might do a better job of living a human life.

In the reading from Hebrews, we are told that Jesus, on coming into the world is given a body. This is so that He can do the Father's will. It is so that the Word can become flesh in other words. The Word of God becomes embodied. Our faith is physical, and Mary stands at its center.

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