

The Visitation
4th Sunday of Advent (C)
(Lk 1:39-45)

In a hilly Jewish suburb of modern Jerusalem, a few miles southwest of the old city, is a beautiful small church dedicated to the “Visitation” of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. This is the location of the village where the family of Zechariah lived in the time of Jesus. The Visitation is one of the Joyful mysteries of the Rosary, and it serves a preparation for the next event to take place in another nearby village, Bethlehem.

When we pray the Rosary and meditate on the “mysteries,” we recognize that these events of the Gospel are foundational to our faith. They are not just quaint events from the past, but ongoing realities in the life of the Church, which must be incorporated into our personal and ecclesial spirituality.

In the western Latin Church, meditation on these Joyful Mysteries has given rise to that important prayer which Catholics pray continually, the “Hail Mary.” It draws from the angel’s greeting in the first Joyful Mystery: “*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee*”; and from Elizabeth’s greeting in the second Joyful Mystery: “*Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.*”

When we meditate on the second joyful mystery of the Visitation, we, like Elizabeth, ask the question, “*Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*” We should ask ourselves, how (in what manner) does Christ come to us today? The answer is that he comes primarily in the Eucharist. The mystery of the Visitation helps us appreciate the Eucharist, because everything that can be said of Mary can be understood of the Church, of which she is the image. Just as Mary brought Christ to her cousin Elizabeth, hidden and invisible within her, so the Church brings Christ to us, hidden and invisible in the Eucharist. Just as Elizabeth experienced joy within her at the coming of Christ into her home, so we experience a deep interior joy when we receive the Body of Christ. Through Mary, Christ came into Zechariah’s house; through the Church Christ comes into our house: “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof...*”

Recently our parish celebrated the Solemnity of our patroness, Our Lady of Guadalupe. When our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego at Tepeyac in 1531, this too was an expression of the Joyful Mystery of the Visitation. The Virgin of Guadalupe, *clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet*” is “encinctured.” That is to say, she is “*with child*” (cf. Rv 12:1-2). Just as Mary went in haste across mountains to visit her cousin bearing the good news of salvation within her, our blessed mother, by means of her beloved Spanish Church, went across oceans to visit her cousins in the new world with the good news of the

Gospel. She went in haste. Although it took fifteen centuries to get the ships ready, *Niña, Pinta, Santa Maria*, she could not get there quickly enough.

Thus, the Mystery of the Visitation not only helps us appreciate how the Lord “comes to me” in the Eucharist, but it also shows us how we, as the Church and bearing Christ within us, must bring him to others in the work of evangelization. The Advent/Christmas season is a special opportunity to share our joy with others, proclaiming it in the lights, expressing it in the cards, sharing it in the gifts. Many of us will literally “set out in haste” along the modern highways to visit our cousins. Let us not go without Christ. We should utilize the holiday family gatherings as an opportunity to bring all our relatives with us to the liturgical celebrations, to rediscover the presence of Christ in our local parish churches.