

Reflection

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Zephaniah 3:14-18a,

Luke 1:39-56

How many of you received the gift of joy last Sunday on the feast of Pentecost? Oh, how fortunate you are! You can enjoy your gift today because Luke rings out loudly with the joy of Mary meeting Elizabeth! They are filled with the Holy Spirit in their encounter!

Previously in Luke, there are two narratives. There is the story of Zechariah, the spouse of Elizabeth and a priest taking his turn at the Temple to spread incense on the altar. In so doing, an angel appears to him to say that his wife will conceive in her old age. But he doubts the angel and was struck dumb until his son John was born. He returns home from the Temple to see that his wife has indeed conceived.

There is also the story of Mary who, after a few innocent questions, *believes* the angel who tells her that she will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and that her son's name will be Jesus. The angel also tells her that her kinswoman Elizabeth who was beyond childbearing years is already in her sixth month of pregnancy. So, Mary set out into the hill country, a rugged road of about 100 miles. We might imagine that Joseph accompanied her and also stayed with her long enough to meet his soon-to-be relatives.

What an encounter that was, Elizabeth whose child in the womb leaped for joy and Mary whose pregnancy was just beginning! Mary stayed with Elizabeth for the next three months, assisting her with care and compassion in the last weeks of her pregnancy. We can also imagine in those months that Mary and Elizabeth would have sung many verses of the Magnificat during their mutual pregnancies: *The Almighty has done great things for us! Holy is God's name! God has lifted up the lowly ... and filled the hungry with good things! Our spirit rejoices in God our Savior.*

In my copy of the daily readings entitled *Give Us This Day*, there is a reflection of Pope Francis from a homily he gave on this very day three years ago. I quote from it:

Here the young woman Mary and the old woman Elizabeth meet, embrace, and awaken the best in each other ... a miracle brought about by the culture of encounter, where no one is discarded or pigeonholed, but all are sought out, because all are needed to reveal the face of God. ... The Holy Spirit impels us to go out from ourselves, from all that hems us in, from the things to which we cling. ...

In all three of Pope Francis' *Apostolic Exhortations*, there are these Latin words - *Gaudium*, *Laetitia*, and *Gaudete* - which mean *Joy*, *Rejoice*, *Be Glad*. Pope Francis accents the *JOY* of the Gospel and he proclaims a culture of *encounter* to discover the

joy of the Gospel and our commitment to its values: action grounded in contemplation to care for the poor and the hungry, as Mary and Elizabeth prayed.

And so, at last Sunday's Feast of Pentecost, blessed are you who received the gift of joy! The rest of us, however, could well receive this gift of joy from today's Liturgy, if we open ourselves up to the Word, for the *Holy Spirit* and *joy* are all over these biblical proclamations!

Let us rejoice in the decision to transfer our properties to the St. Therese Senior Living Community! Let us engage in a culture of encounter as Mary and Elizabeth did! Let us, to quote Francis "...awaken the best in each other" as we move through these next several months together!

and let the Joy of the Gospel prevail