

## Reflection for Mercy Day Mass

The gospel reading we have just heard is strangely appropriate to this day and these times, as so often is our experience in listening to scripture. The Magnificat is one of the most frequently used prayers of praise from the writings of the early Christians, and it is more than a prayer of praise. It reminds us at every reading that, while praise of God in words is good, we need to praise God also in our lives by our merciful and compassionate response to the needs of God's little ones.

Mary proclaims the prayer in the context of the Visitation. Newly aware of her own pregnancy, Mary was confronted with a very strange situation of unexpected change. She could have decided to take care of herself but instead she responds to the message she receives that her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, is also to have a child. A very young mother-to-be sets out on an arduous journey to visit an elderly mother-to-be. There are numerous depictions in art of the meeting of these two women and we feel sure a warm embrace was part of their greeting. As these days of living with the pandemic continue, I find myself appreciating anew how much the sense of touch is part of our human connection. We know sadness in the realization that many are suffering for the want of people beside with, with them, touching them. Zooming, and other forms of electronic communication, have become commonplace among us and we are grateful for that, but while we can use our eyes and ears to communicate, we are really missing that sense of touch. This context of the Magnificat is itself a message to us – the ability to touch and respond to touch is a valued gift.

In the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth the gospel-writer has Mary draw on the song of Hannah, to be found in 1 Samuel, as a way of expressing her wonder and joy at what is happening. But as noted earlier, the prayer expresses much more than praise of God. Rather than let us take refuge in the heavenly realms it brings us back to real life and reminds us that praise of God must always find its legitimacy in the way we live. God is the God whose “mercy reaches from age to age; who routs the proud of heart; who exalts the lowly; who fills the hungry with good things”. As I prepared these few words I felt I should be calling all of you, who will be participating in this Mass around the world, to respond to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor as you are moved by the words of the Magnificat. And yet, my experience of the past few months is that you have been calling me.

There are among us many, many people of Mercy, Sisters, Associates and Ministry Partners alike, who have in numerous gentle, kind, creative and strong ways responded to this COVID-19 situation with truly merciful hearts, hearts moved make the God of Mercy present among us. I know I am only one who has been deeply touched by this outpouring of Mercy. The Mercy E-News; the many on-line conversations at local and international levels, some linked to Mercy Global Presence posters; the Mercy Global Action paper “Hope in a time of Pandemic”; are among the sources which have enabled us to be inspired by each other, and inspired by those beyond our Mercy World who are making the God of Mercy present – knowingly or unknowingly.

So I am grateful for this Mercy Day celebration, for the chance to reflect on Mary's response in Mercy as she 'hastens' to be with and spend time with Elizabeth, and for the Magnificat prayer of praise. We can't really pray it without renewing our commitment to being people of Mercy; to being in our own lives “Mothers of Mercy”; to our Mercy mission of making the God of Mercy present. This very day we will find ways to bring compassion and mercy to someone.