

Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 15th August 2022

Feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Virgin Mary

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.

2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*

3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.

4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.

5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Luke 1:39-56 Mary visits Elizabeth ...

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord, and 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.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; 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. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.' And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.



A Short Thought

There is so much to savour and ponder in this short gospel so take time with it, to enjoy it. Having learned from the angel that she will give birth to the Son of God, Mary hurries to visit her pregnant relative Elizabeth in the hill country. The intimate conversation that follows portrays Jesus as more important than John. It also shows God already at work to overturn the world's structures and expectations. The spotlight shines on Mary and Elizabeth, two lowly and shamed ones through whom God has chosen to begin the transformation of the world. Women — so often overlooked or ignored both in society at large and in biblical narratives — have the only speaking roles in this vignette. Mary's first words prompt an immediate, silent, response from Elizabeth's unborn child. John leaps, acknowledging both her presence and the significance of the child she carries in her womb. John's reaction to Mary's voice fulfils Gabriel's prophecy, "even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). Already John points to the coming one. By greeting Mary with honour, Elizabeth overturns social expectations. Mary is an unmarried pregnant woman. She might expect social judgment, shame, even ostracism from her older kinswoman. Yet Elizabeth knows from her own experience the cost of being shamed and excluded. In her culture a woman's primary purpose in life was to bear children, so as an elderly infertile wife she had endured a lifetime of being treated as a failure. Her response to her miraculous pregnancy emphasizes that God's grace has reversed her social status: "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (Luke 1:25). At long last, in her old age, she is an honourable married woman, pregnant with her husband's son. Elizabeth continues the pattern of social reversal by opening her arms and her home to a relative whom her neighbours would expect her to reject. Instead of shaming Mary, she welcomes, blesses, and celebrates her, treating her as more honourable than herself. Thus the pregnancy that might have brought Mary shame brings

joy and honour instead. When Elizabeth welcomes Mary, she practices the same kind of inclusive love that Jesus will show to prostitutes and sinners. She sees beyond the shameful situation of Mary to the reality of God's love at work even among those whom society rejects and excludes. Where do we see God at work in the unexpected, the outcast, the shunned or the forgotten? And, when we look at ourselves, where does God break our own judgements of our unworthiness? Allow God this week to surprise, hold and transform assumptions about yourself, others and God.

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Two pregnant women take centre stage here, and you are privileged to listen in on their conversation. They chat about the mysterious workings of God, to which their own lives bear eloquent witness. Allow them to invite you to participate. Perhaps one of them asks you what you are doing to bear witness to the values of God which run counter to those of your culture.
2. The Visitation is the primordial encounter, where two judged people meet. Mary was carrying God within her and they brought joy to Elizabeth and John within her. Where have you experienced acceptance, joy, love ...God in an encounter with another? Every time we meet another person, we bring God to each other – think of a time where you have had the experience of bringing God to another.
3. Do you have experience of being 'heard into speech' as Mary was, or of 'hearing another into speech'? What was that experience like?
4. After a life of total trust in God and his mysterious will for her and her son, Mary now receives her reward. Can you join her in praying the Magnificat, asking for the grace to share her joy?
5. This week try to walk around a place of beauty. Look and listen, smell and touch the beauty of nature. As you walk pray the first lines of Mary's poem - 'my soul glorifies the Lord'. Be filled for this time with thanks for all you see, hear, touch and feel of the creation of God.

Prayer -

Lord Jesus Christ, You have destroyed the power of death and given the hope of eternal life for body and soul. You granted your Mother a special place in your glory, and did not allow decay to touch her body. As we rejoice in the Assumption of Mary, grant us renewed confidence in the victory of life over death. Amen.

Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

We pray for Ukraine. For all of humanity distorted by war. For all the lives lost, homes seized, and peace broken. May the Spirit of comfort and compassion envelop all who dwell in fear. May peace prevail and justice reign. May love always be the guide and measure of our actions and responses. Amen

