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“A Song of Mary”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year A)

December 11, 2016

Luke 1:26-35, 46-55

Two words on the Word: “Hail Mary, full of grace,” and, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” For those of you who have traveled to France and have experienced the great Notre Dames of Paris, Chartres, and Reims, you know that in the Middle Ages, Mary was held in high esteem. *Hail, Mary*. The art, the architecture, the labyrinths, the flying buttresses: the magnificence of these great works of art and architecture sang a song to Mary, the esteemed mother of God. She was the fair lady of the Knights of the Round Table. She was the symbol of chaste love.

But it is the prayer, “Hail, Mary,” that I learned at my mother’s knee. It is a prayer very familiar to generations of Roman Catholics and, probably for them, it is the most familiar and most repeated of the entire New Testament. But knowing the context of that prayer in Luke, for Protestants, Catholics, and the Orthodox, adds a great depth of meaning.

Mary is blessed, not simply because of the biological fact of being Jesus’ mother. What truly exalts Mary is not special privilege that makes her separate and different but what makes her similar to us: **her humanity, her discipleship, her trusting responsiveness to God’s word**. As Elizabeth said to her in her visit, “Blessed is she who trusted the Lord’s Word, that the Lord’s Word would be fulfilled.”

Let us let the song of Mary that she made in response to the declaration of the angel Gabriel call us to take her hand so that we can walk along with her on those paths of life we cannot see. “We are almost there,” she says. “Where?” I ask. Then she says, “The place where the spirit rejoices.” “My soul magnifies the Lord,” she sang in proclamation after hearing the word of the angel, “and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. From now on, all generations will call me blessed.”

What holds us back from experiencing that blessedness that she sings of? We all want to experience the same reality that she did, but she reminds us how proud thoughts scatter us. She reminds us how riches bring us emptiness. She reminds us how ruling over others keeps us from service. She reminds us how arrogance of mind and heart diminish us. With her hand in ours, allow us to be aware that we are altogether to be disciples, to respond to God's Word with a cooperative spirit with the very love that reshapes the world: the Word made Flesh.

Within a few days, we will begin to exchange greetings of the coming season by wishing each other a Merry Christmas. Ours should not be an artificial merriment, but rather a merriment of remembrance of Jesus' saving death that shows us where true joy lies, a remembrance of the promise of God's love.

She sang, "Mercy is from age to age; God has shown might with his arm. The hungry are filled with good things, the promises of God's love to Israel, his servant, are fulfilled."

The poet, Jack Shea, places these lyrics in Mary's song:

All that I am
sings of the God
who brings his life
to birth in me.
My spirit soars
on the wings of my Lord.
He has smiled on me
and the blaze of his smile
no woman or man
shall ever forget.

Amen.

Influences: Jack Shea
Richard Viladesau

Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.