

Almost Home

'No-one can celebrate a genuine Christmas without being truly poor. Only those who need someone to come on their behalf will have that someone. That someone is God, Emmanuel, God-with-us...Without poverty of spirit, there can be no abundance of God.' St. Oscar Romero

Christmas is for people in need. All of us. No matter how seasoned the saint, each of us possess an ache only Jesus can fill. In other words, knowing the One who is our home doesn't mean we have arrived home; we are still on the way. Christmas can be a good time to recall resistance en route, and receive afresh from Jesus and His members.

No two people demonstrate this better than Mary and Elizabeth. Their 'visitation' highlights what we can be for each other as we seek to bring Jesus into the world (LK 1:39-45). If you recall, pregnant Mary, compelled by the Spirit, rushes to see her cousin Elizabeth, nearly bursting with John the Baptist. I've been dismayed by homilies that portray Mary as composed and selfless, matron on a mission to care for Elizabeth. Not evident in the text—just one of many ways we drain the blood from the saints then bleach them unnaturally white.

I prefer to think of immaculate Mary as a stressed-out teenager who needs God's Word spoken to her; the burden is huge, and she needs solidarity with someone who 'gets' her load—not platitudes from a priest or husband but another woman swelling at the seams who may well share her temptation to doubt the marvels at hand.

And wow. Elizabeth delivers with the most astute prophetic greeting one can imagine: Hail, Mother of my Lord! I am not worthy of this visit! Bless you for believing that what God says will be done! The words of her friend loose Mary's tongue and she scats one of the most beautiful songs ever (LK 1: 46-55).

Maybe your efforts to bring forth Christ this year have been frustrated by doubts or loneliness or failure or misunderstanding. Celebrating His coming reminds you; it hurts. You are right where Jesus wants you to be. He comes for the empty, not the self-possessed. Open to the One who is coming and who comes now through His Spirit. Welcome Him in quiet. Then hurry to a friend. May the Spirit of Elizabeth prophesy through us to each other: Blessed are you who believe!

'It may well be, as Jesus says, more blessed to give than to receive. But it is more difficult to receive...In Jesus, God wanted to do something for us so utterly beyond the bounds of human imagination or projection that He had to resort to angels, pregnant virgins, and stars in the sky. We didn't think of it, understand it, or approve it. All we could do, at Bethlehem, was receive it.'
William Willimon

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