

Homily preached on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 at the Women's Ordination  
Worldwide Liturgy

*I dedicate this homily with gratitude to the memory of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, who wrote: "How much I would have wanted to be a priest so that I could preach on the Blessed Virgin Mary."*

## **Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)**

"I allow no woman to teach or to have authority over men. Let them be quiet." (1 Tim 3:11-12)

Whoever wrote these lines (attributed to St Paul) had obviously not heard Mary singing her Magnificat at the top of her voice! The Evangelist Luke is not giving us a quiet, submissive Mary.

She is not singing softly a lullaby to lull us to sleep. Here Mary is a prophet issuing a wake up call, loudly proclaiming a revolution. Mary is not rocking a cradle, she is rocking the world. She will not be silenced. She is a woman possessed: possessed by the Divine Breath, the Holy Spirit. The Magnificat is a song of praise, of thanksgiving and a profession of faith. It exudes joy, power and hope. Mary is filled to overflowing. A new wineskin for the New Wine. The words surge onto her lips. Two thousand years on and they still flow on like a great river. They are both our inheritance and our mission.

Mary tells us: This is who God is, and this is what God has done, is doing and will do. The God of Mary is not a distant detached God endorsing from afar the unjust status quo. No, the God of Mary of Nazareth is a God intimately involved in the world and whose action is truly subversive.

But let's be clear: Mary is not proclaiming a bloody, violent revolution where places are merely reversed and nothing really has changed. The same dynamic of competition, envy, greed, powerplay and domination remains untouched. Mary's Magnificat is far more radical: It heralds a total transformation of relationships through justice and mercy. This is what the reign of God, the reign of Love looks like.

The Magnificat tells us that the world is in the process of being re-made, re-created, re-ordered. Distorted relationships are giving way to relations of equality, mutuality and solidarity.

Mary is a visionary. She sees beneath the appearances. She sees a different reality than what meets the eye. She sees the Spirit at work in the foundations of life, bringing to birth justice, peace and love.

This is the Good News.

When, under the impulse of the Spirit, we join Mary in our Yes to God we open a passageway for new life to flow in us and through us. That life bears fruit, lasting fruit. New forms emerge, the impossible becomes reality.

Mary is solidly rooted, anchored in her people, she is mindful of her ancestors. She remembers the past but she is not locked in it. She remembers God's promises, God's faithfulness. Her experience of the strength of that bond, of that covenant is the basis for her trust. She knows, intimately, that God is Emmanuel, God with us and for us. Because God is faithful there is hope and there is a future. The God of promise is the God of fulfilment.

Mary exults. She jubilates with God's own joy. Her jubilation is both mystical and prophetic, intimate and cosmic. That joy is truly expansive and explosive. It opens up spaces, unlocks doors, disrupts, goes beyond imposed limitations.

Can we too make space in our hearts for that divine rejoicing? A rejoicing not because we are smug and things are going well in our little bubble and we are indifferent to the immense suffering in our world, but a rejoicing because God is God. That is a truly revolutionary joy.

In a church where unjust, unequal power relationships have been sacralised, especially on grounds of gender, Mary's Magnificat is a call to look again. These structures, these teachings, these roles, these stereotypes, these exclusions are the products of a distorted image of God which has prevailed through millennia. The gender apartheid in our church is no more godly than the racial apartheid was in South Africa, and truly no less a scandal. A scandal in the biblical sense, an obstacle to the Gospel. Mary's Magnificat exposes it for what it is: not the good fruit of God's will and action, but the rotten fruit of sexism and misogyny.

As I prepared these reflections, some of the glaring absurdity in our present ecclesial practices came to mind: Mary's Magnificat is from the Gospel, meaning that at Mass when it is read it has to be by a male priest or a male deacon. Today

Mary wouldn't be allowed to proclaim her Magnificat in our churches ...but she would have to hand it over to be delivered through male, ordained, lips! And as for preaching on it, she would also be considered unfit because of her gender.

What have we done with the God of Mary 's Magnificat? Turned into a male idol to give some men power over women in the guise of divine male authority.

Mary of Nazareth proclaimed the gestating Christ with authority. Mary of Magdala proclaimed the same Christ now risen with authority. Their yes to God the source of their authority, not male permission and approval. Free women, empowered and empowering women. Women alive and on fire.

Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church, whose prayer was read earlier, was another such prophetic, visionary woman. She too refused to keep quiet. She had things to tell, Good News to proclaim. Her God, Lady Wisdom, is at work and at play in all of creation. Hildegard reminds us that we are an integral part of that web of life, sustained by the one Spirit of love. She too rejoices in the marvellous work of creation and re-creation, calling us to just relationships with all creatures.

When she prays "Make us into waving fronds so that we may dance before you in joy," I visualize Mary dancing her Magnificat. Will we let ourselves join in that divine dance, that dance of freedom and joyful hope?

Together with Mary and Hildegard, Elizabeth and Mary of Magdala, and countless witnesses, women and men, we affirm.

With You among us, we are holy people.

Within your embrace the land is holy.

All created things live your praise.

We hear, we see, we are in awe

And we give thanks.

Magnificat!

Soline Humbert (Vatinel)

[solinehumbert@yahoo.ie](mailto:solinehumbert@yahoo.ie)