

Homily for August 16, 2020 – 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Historically we have said that, as a Church, the two major ways our faith is passed on is through **Scripture** and **Tradition**. Scripture is what was huddle around each time we gather for liturgy and each time we open and read our Bibles at home. It is God's Word preserved, interpreted, and passed on so that we can know how God called our ancestors to live back then and how God calls us to live here and now. Tradition, on the other hand, includes truths revealed to us from the Apostles as well as the Church's teachings and doctrines handed down from one generation to the next. Tradition should never get hard, or stagnant, or rigid but should always be at the service of Scripture itself. Scripture and Tradition were always meant to go hand in hand.

The Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary is not part of Scripture; you will not find in any Bible the story of Mary being assumes body and soul into heaven. However, the Assumption of Mary is very much part of the Church's Tradition. Since we want to honour this aspect of our faith, but we do not have a story of the Assumption in Scripture, we turn to another Mary story, the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, instead. What can we say about Mary's journey of faith? And based on her journey of faith, what does it say about our own journeys of faith? There is a lot going on in this story, but I'd like to look at two things in particular.



Firstly, I go back to one of the many pearls of wisdom that were dropped on my lap during the Men's Rite of Passage retreats I have participated in. At the end of the retreat, we were given some advice on how to ease ourselves back into regular, mundane life after living five intense, powerful, and wonderful days together. The advice came in the words of Jesus when he instructed his apostles not to throw their pearls to the pigs. Never throw your pearls to the swine. Never. Why? Because pearls are precious, and pigs are in no position to appreciate them. Think of the last time you saw a pig wearing lipstick and a pearl necklace. It looked ridiculous! So, the advice at the end of the retreat was: "Guys, I know you're on a

high, and you want to share this experience with anyone and everyone immediately. Don't do it. Resist the temptation. Wait at least six months before you even share it with your wife. Let this experience percolate, ferment, germinate, deepen within you before you share it with someone else. And after six months, even then do not expect nor get disappointed that women do not understand what you experienced at a "men's retreat." Maybe that's a key as to why we are told Elizabeth was pregnant for six months before she welcomed Mary into her house. She needed to let the experience deepen within her before she gave it away to anyone else.



Pregnant Mary is not told by the Angel of the Lord to hasten to the priest's house so he can give her the "correct" theological interpretation of what is happening to her. Pregnant Mary is told to go see her cousin Elizabeth who is

also pregnant. What Mary knows in her body is also known by Elizabeth in her body. This is what is known as "corporeal" knowing or "body" knowing. It is knowing something not in our minds but in our bodies. A pregnant woman knows something in her body that only another pregnant woman can fully understand.

Had Mary gone with haste to the priest, she would have been throwing her precious pearls to the pigs. Mary, instead, goes to Elizabeth and has a conversation with someone who can respect and reverence what is going on in her. So, in your own lives, only share the most precious stuff in your heart with those who can give it the appreciation and reverence it deserves. For example, if you are battling cancer, find a support group or even an individual who has or had cancer. They will be your best ally. If you are struggling within your marriage, counselling may be very helpful, but finding a couple who have a few battle scars themselves and have lived to see a better day, may be even more helpful.

There is a second interesting thing about this story of the Visitation that I think has something to say to us. The Church's Tradition tells us that the church was born on the day of Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and empowered them to become missionaries. While I think that is true,

I also know that before any birth is a conception. I think the Church's "conception" occurred when Mary visited Elizabeth. It was not a room full of frightened Apostles who are eventually filled with the Holy Spirit, but we are told that Elizabeth ***was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed in a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women."***

This is the beginning of the Church. Two women, one who is seemingly too old to get pregnant and the other who has had no intimate contact with a man, are both pregnant. Both have had an encounter with God, God who makes the impossible possible. Mary is told by the angel that her much older cousin, Elizabeth, is promise a child. Mary runs to Elizabeth to remind Elizabeth to stay close to the promise that is growing inside of her. Elizabeth, in turn, reminds Mary to also stay close to God's promise made to her, that she will bear the Messiah. They remind each other of the faithfulness of God and how God will walk with them through the difficult and frightening days, months and years ahead. It will not be an easy walk for both these women, yet this is Church at its best.

As Church, we need to do for each other what Mary and Elizabeth did. My job is to remind you of the promises of God growing within you. My job is to encourage you, especially on the hard days, to stay close to God who is so close to you. My job is to tell you that what God begins in you will not fail but will ultimately be victorious because none of God's plans ends in failure. And your job is the same-- to remind me to stay close to the promises of God in my life.

The Acadians, even though they were deported and scattered, never gave up the faith. They reminded each other, while in exile, that God's promises still lived in their hearts and that God's plan is never thwarted but always bears good, abundant, and lasting fruit.

Fr. Phil