

Homily: Advent Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we celebrate God who blesses us, so that we may be joyful like Mary and Elizabeth in today's Gospel. At times, our belief and hope are weak. So we call upon our compassionate God.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" AND "blessed [happy] are you because you believed that what the Lord said to you would be fulfilled." We will reflect on two words, "blessed" and "happy," starting with the latter word, "happy." Elizabeth acclaimed Mary "happy" because Mary believed that what the Lord told her through angel Gabriel would be fulfilled. She believed two seemingly impossible things: One—that she would conceive as a virgin by the Holy Spirit; secondly, that Elizabeth, her old cousin, was pregnant.

Mary and Elisabeth both felt blessed, meaning, both felt gifted. Both women were gifted with sons. John the Baptist would speak in the name of God. Jesus would be God incarnate.

I believe that this Gospel about Mary and Elizabeth says something most important about us. We, too, can be blessed and happy women and men whenever we believe that God speaks to us and through us. We are blessed when we believe that God becomes visible and real through us.

Mary and Elizabeth mutually sparked happiness in one another. We, too, can spark happiness when we mutually acclaim the goodness of God in one another. Mary greeted Elizabeth—and everything inside Elizabeth jumped for joy, including the baby in her womb. Elizabeth praised Mary and she began to sing the Magnificat.

Through God's Holy Spirit, Mary and Elizabeth were blessed and happy. At the end of the Gospels, Mary Magdalene believed what seemed impossible. She proclaimed Jesus as risen from the dead, bringing great joy to the apostles. Mary Magdalene was blessed and happy.

Throughout history, women especially, have played key roles as people who believed what God told them and then acted on it, just like Mary and Elizabeth did.

Many of us remember Rosa Parks, the black woman in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1956, she bravely refused to leave her bus seat for a white passenger. That act was a blessing, which contributed immensely to the civil rights movement.

In 2003, after 14 years of crippling civil war, Catholic, Protestant and Muslim women bonded together. They locked the male delegates from the warring factions in a large conference hall until they made a peace settlement.

Three years later Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president of Liberia, the first woman president in all of Africa. She later received a Nobel Peace Prize. These women were blessings for Liberia and the world.

At this very moment in Iran, elderly mothers of adult children are on the streets calling for justice. Their adult sons who are calling for justice, are being killed by the government. These elderly and brave women boldly critique the government in the name of their sons. They are doing what seems impossible. They are blessings and hope to bring justice and joy to Iran.

My sisters and brothers, we are disciples of Jesus, the visible and incarnate God. Like Mary, Elizabeth, and many other regular as well as saintly women in history, we are called to believe God's word to us through the scriptures, or during our times of prayer. We are called to act on fulfilling God's word, namely, making God visible in our present world. That is the hope of Advent. We prepare to not only celebrate Jesus' birth 2000 years ago, but to help birth Jesus in this present age.