

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday of Advent C

The Gospel reading for this fourth Sunday of Advent finds us with Mary, visiting her kinswoman, Elizabeth. The Visitation is a moment for Mary to help Elizabeth, knowing that Elizabeth was with child herself. The Visitation is a moment of particular beauty and joy. This joy made St. John the Baptist leap in his mother's womb. The presence of Mary with her Son brought joy to Sts. Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist.

I have spoken about Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant, as well as the new Ark of the Lord and the new Ark of Holiness. Mary is also the new Ark of Splendor. The Ark of Splendor is a name found sometimes in Second Chronicles 20:21, as well as possibly in some of the psalms. What is behind the name is that the Ark possessed three qualities: beauty, glory and it brought the Israelites joy. The Ark was a box of acacia wood, gilded and decorated beautifully. It was also the great pride and joy of the people.

Mary is the New Ark of Splendor. The Lord gifted Mary with a tremendous beauty, although that beauty was veiled as the old Ark of Splendor was covered with a cloth of dark bluish color whenever it was brought out for battle. Mary was veiled while in this life, although her beauty is now unveiled as she enjoys eternal life in Heaven. Mary's glory was not in this life, as she had to endure suffering and opposition. Mary's glory was in her Assumption into Heaven.

The Ark of Splendor was not the only source of joy and glory in the Old Testament. There was, even before Mary, a woman who was a source of joy and glory. Judith, having defeated an Assyrian commander and delivered her town from a siege, received the praise of the people from Jerusalem, who proclaimed, "You are the glory of Jerusalem! You are the great pride of Israel! You are the great boast of our nation!" (15:9). Some translations read that Judith was the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the fairest honor of our race.

Mary's presence brought joy to those whom she met. Mary reflected the sweetness and joy of the angels and the joy of Heaven, just as the beauty of the old Ark of Splendor reflected the beauty and greatness of the Lord. The Lord spoke to us of a joy that no one can take away from us. Mary is certainly a joy that no one can take away from us. One of her titles is the Cause of our Joy. Unlike the old Ark which was lost, Mary is always there for us whenever we need her and call upon her.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we also call to mind the Dogma of Mary's Perpetual Virginity. Unlike the other dogmas concerning Mary, namely her Divine Maternity, her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption into Heaven, this dogma was proclaimed in stages, the first stage being the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the final stage being the Third Council of Constantinople in 681.

Mary's virginity relates to her role as the Ark of Splendor in several ways. First, Mary's virginity reveals the great beauty which the Lord preserved in her soul. Though her physical beauty was veiled in this life, nevertheless her soul radiated the Lord's light, as the moon reflects the sun's light. Mary sang in the Magnificat that her soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. Because she was dedicated to the Lord, and to no other, her virginity is a sign of her dedication and that her soul would only reflect the beauty which came from the Lord. Mary possessed the glory of virginity, as we hear in the Roman Missal.

Mary's virginity would also bring joy to those who sought the Lord. Her virginity allowed those who came to her to experience a divine joy. Since her heart was given to the Lord alone, those who came to her and those she visited could experience a divine joy purely given without adulteration by anything else. When she visited the house of Zechariah, St. Zechariah, St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist experienced a pure joy that came from the Lord.

What does this mean for us? As we draw near to Christmas and make all of our preparations, we are aware that the Lord is near to us. The Lord does not come alone. Whenever we ask Mary to come to our homes, she will bring us a joy that comes from the Lord. She can bring us the joy of her Son, and that is a joy that no one can ever take away from us. If we want joy instead of discord and tension this Christmas, we must invite into our homes the New Ark of Splendor, Mary, who brings us the Lord's joy.

If we invite Mary to our homes, we will also experience beauty and glory. Mary, the New Ark of Splendor, radiates the Lord's majesty to us. She brings beauty into our lives, and Christmas time is a time whenever we need beauty, especially whenever there is a lot of darkness or pain.

As we approach the altar, we know that we cannot radiate the Lord's splendor, beauty, glory and majesty as Mary did. However, we pray that through her intercession, we may imitate her and that we can bring joy into someone's heart this Christmas. We pray that the Lord will bring us light and glory and beauty and joy into our lives.