

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 8th 2016

While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him,

“Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.”

He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” Luke 11

I suspect that Jesus is resisting a compliment. Someone in the crowd praises him, in effect, saying: "You are so wonderful! The woman who bore you must have been spectacular!" We know that what the woman shouted out is marvelously true. One of the greatest things about Mary is how well her son turned out.

All of us have deflected compliments - deserving or not. Jesus takes the praise deeper, but saying something about the real meaning of being "blessed." Blessedness is not about relationship. It's not who you know. It's not what you have. It's not about status or possessions, or any of the other things associated with honor or success.

What truly leads to our being blessed - gifted, full of grace, fully happy - is when we "hear the word of God" and not only hear it but actually "observe it."

Letting the word of God make its home in me (as Mary did so profoundly) is to let my heart be transformed - changed, more tender, more affectionate, more like the heart of Jesus - by God's word. It fills us with deep gratitude. Like Mary, we can give thanks and praise to our God:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49

I know in my own life that I need to let God's word penetrate into my heart and to let it transform me with gratitude. That is how I will be effective at living it. If I don't let the call - the challenge, the movement out of myself - happen in me, the word seems to fall on rocky ground, or I let the anxiety and cares of the world choke it to death. It has almost nothing to do with making pledges or affirmations of what I hope to do, or even commit to doing. When my heart gets touched, the word is sweet tasting. It isn't bitter or a difficult challenge. When my heart is touched by God's love, my heart opens to be shown something, or to be attracted to have my desiring re-formed. The word of love points me to something I'd forgotten or refused to hear. Then, when I feel enkindled with the fire of his love for me, something very close to joy and freedom accompanies that gift. I more easily experience the grace that makes listening to others, thinking of their needs first, sacrificing for them, accompanying them, so much easier.

How blessed it is to actually hear the word of God - as love, as invitation, as call. And, how truly blessed it is to delightfully respond to it.

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