

“Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42). In response to Elizabeth’s greeting, the Virgin Mary offers a joyful prayer. When the church gathers for Evening Prayer, Mary’s prayer is sung as a canticle.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; Magnificat ánima mea Dóminum,” (Lk 1:46). In Latin, “Magnificat” can be translated as “to proclaim” or “to magnify.” “My soul magnifies the greatness of the Lord.” Mary responds to the coming of the Messiah with the faith that God had been awaiting since the beginning of time. “She whom the Almighty made “full of grace” responds by offering her whole being” (CCC 2617).

Jesus calls us to respond in a similar way. We recall the scholar of the law who asks about eternal life: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27). Jesus replies: “Do this and you will live” (10:28). He then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the point.

Mary’s Magnificat has an Old Testament counterpart in the prayer of Hannah. Hannah was barren so she went to Shiloh and prayed to God for a child. She prayed that if God would grant her a son, she would devote him to God’s service (Hahn 341). The Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) offered a model to Mary in composing her own song.

Hannah prayed: “My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted by my God. I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in your victory” (1 Sam 2:1). Hannah recognizes that she is less fortunate than others but trusts that God can make things right. Hannah believes that God will execute justice on her behalf and in fact will respond to all of the poor who place their trust in him (Note).

As Mary prays, we see this same trust in her heart, mind, and soul. “He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1:51-53). The Canticle of Mary is a “song of thanksgiving for the fullness of graces poured out in the economy of salvation and the song of the ‘poor’ whose hope is met by the fulfillment of the promises made to our ancestors, ‘to Abraham and to his posterity for ever’” (CCC 2619).

With the trust of Mary, let us sing praises to our God. With the thanks of Hannah, let us be willing to respond with faithful service. Amidst the struggles of the pandemic, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. All the more reason to pray with confidence:

- The LORD puts to death and gives life. We need not fear the virus for the Lord has conquered sin and death. Where there is grief and sadness, he invites us to comfort those who mourn.
- The world is full of injustice, but this world is passing. In the Lord’s Kingdom to come, the poor are made rich and the humble exalted.
- The Lord took 5 loaves and 2 fish and fed 5,000. If we humbly offer the Lord all that we can, he will magnify it so that we may help many more than we think possible.
- The Lord sees the intentions of our hearts. We need not seek the praise and attention of others that is fleeting. God rewards our sincere efforts to do good in the Kingdom to come.
- When we fail, let us never despair. Seek forgiveness, for God’s mercy endures forever.
- God loves you. Lift the spirits of another by sharing God’s love with them.