

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the Visitation. Mary went to help her older cousin Elizabeth but also to seek counsel. She knew of her holiness, her relationship with God, and she trusted in Elizabeth's ability to guide her through her own miraculous pregnancy.

Thought to be barren, Elizabeth did not give up hope. She prayed for a child for many years and accepted God's will as to the timing of the gift of life. Once the impossible became possible, Elizabeth sang God's praises. Throughout her pregnancy she recognizes the grace present to allow her to conceive when she was beyond the years of fertility. To paraphrase Hebrews: "Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first barrenness to establish the second fertility. By this "will," John has been consecrated (Heb 10:9-10).

Elizabeth's husband Zechariah was much more troubled by the will of God. When the Angel Gabriel informed Zechariah that the couple would conceive a child and name him John, Zechariah could not accept this. He did not yet believe that all things were possible with the help of God.

We may have our own doubts about God's plans for our lives. Are we willing to wait for God to take the lead? Are we willing to recognize that God knows what is best for us and wants for us to freely choose to marry our will with His? It is very human to doubt and to question. Do we ask God for the clarity of thought to understand his will?

We can look to the Gospel of Matthew to recall the doubts of Joseph. He could not understand how Mary was pregnant and he couldn't imagine how God had heard his prayers for the coming of the Messiah and fulfilled them within the context of his chaste marriage to Mary. "Joseph ... teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses ... we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course."¹

Unwilling to accept the will of God, Zechariah lost his voice for nine months. When Zechariah came out of the temple sanctuary unable to speak, the onlookers understood his silence was the result of seeing a vision. Even in sickness or infirmity, we may be a witness to the Good News. God used the nine months of silence to help Zechariah understand. Like Zechariah, we too may doubt the active involvement of God in steering the course of our lives.

The pure and innocent often find it much easier to accept God. Like Elizabeth and Mary, from within the womb John accepts the will of God. In the encounter of the Visitation, he leapt at the presence of Jesus. Elizabeth gives voice to the actions of her son in the womb. Mary, "most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" Jesus (Lk 1:42). The faith of Elizabeth echoes throughout the ages each time we pray the Hail Mary. Like Mary, we can entrust ourselves to the spiritual maturity of Elizabeth to guide us.

In a skeptical age that questions when life begins, we can learn from the acceptance of God's will from John, Elizabeth, and Mary. Each unborn child deserves a chance to leap for joy in the sanctity of the womb. Each child deserves the inalienable right to life outside the womb, to leap for joy in the light of day. How will the Lord choose that life to steer the course of future human events?

And what of those who are slow to accept God's will? Elizabeth went against tradition by naming her son John rather than Zechariah. She did not go against God for John was the name given by the Angel Gabriel. Zechariah confirms the name by writing on a tablet, "John is his name ... Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God" (Lk 1:63-64). Just as life is a gift from God, so too is our speech. In gratitude, we should always awake from silence by blessing God.

“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people ... And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God” (Lk 1:68, 76-78).

¹ Patris Corde #2