



# PRAISING GOD'S GOODNESS!

Reflections on  
Mary's *Magnificat* Prayer

## AT HOME WITH GOD’S WORD

Mary’s *Magnificat* prayer (Luke 1:47-56, from the first words, “my soul magnifies the Lord”) is a portrait of Mary’s soul that is entirely woven from threads of Scripture. Here we see how completely at home she is with God’s Word, moving with ease in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with God’s Word, which becomes her word, and her word issues from God’s Word. We see how her thoughts are attuned to God’s thoughts, how her will is one with God’s will. Since Mary is completely imbued with God’s Word, she can become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God’s thoughts and wills with God’s will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves.

—Pope Benedict XVI  
*God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, #41



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

IN THESE WORDS Mary expresses her whole program of life: not setting herself at the center, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor. Only then does goodness enter the world. Mary's greatness consists in that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord. She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises.

—Pope Benedict XVI  
*God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, #41

*How might I better place God at the center of my life today?*

WHEN WE DEVOTE all our thoughts to the Lord's praise and service, we proclaim God's greatness. Our observance of God's commands shows that we have God's power and greatness always at heart. Our spirit rejoices in God our Savior, and delights in the mere recollection of our creator who gives us hope for eternal salvation. These words of praise, therefore, may be fittingly uttered by all of God's creatures, but it is especially appropriate

that they should be spoken by the blessed Mother of God. Above all other saints, she alone could truly rejoice in Jesus, her Savior, for she knew that he who was the source of eternal salvation would be born in time in her body, in one person both her own son and her Lord.

—St. Bede, the Venerable

*How can I more openly proclaim God's greatness today?*

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

GOD FAVORS the lowly, which gives us hope. Mary speaks for all those who have been lowly, on the outside, at the bottom, colonized, suppressed, and totally outside of the halls of the princes and power wielders. If she has been favored and blessed, if she is a sign of the ultimate and greatest power, then the lowly and obscure who follow her can believe themselves favored and backed up by the universe. They may make their demands and unite against the princes who oppress them. If the hidden is real, if it is true that spiritual power is greater than the power of guns and bombs, then the lowly and the oppressed have hope. If the Almighty sides with justice, hopes can be fulfilled and all can win equality.

—Sidney Callahan

*The Magnificat* (Seabury Press, 1975)

*How might I be more eager to help those who are lowly,  
neglected and most in need?*

O MARY, TRULY, you are blessed among women, because through you your forebearers have found salvation. For you were to give birth to the Savior who was to win them salvation. Truly, you are blessed among women, for without seed you have borne, as your fruit, him who bestows blessings on the whole world and redeems it from that curse that made it sprout thorns. Truly, you are blessed among women, because, though a woman by nature, you will become, in reality, God's mother. If he whom you are to bear is truly God made flesh, then rightly do we call you God's mother. For you have truly given birth to God.

—St. Sophronius  
*Patriarch of Jerusalem*

*How might I imitate Mary's willingness  
to let Christ be born in her?*

*"The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name."*

GOD CHOSE TO TAKE FLESH in the woman who found favor in God's eyes and responded with a full "yes." Her response was not only an initial agreement but a lifelong obedience to God's redemptive presence in which she followed Jesus in the most perfect way. Her life was a life of always fuller abandonment to the divine will, a total emptying out in faith. Mary's whole being is in the service of Jesus. She is totally mother, totally given

to letting Jesus be born into this world, not only long ago in Bethlehem, but today and always in the heart of anyone who wants to find God. Seeing Mary always means seeing the mother of God. Knowing Mary always means knowing the one who gives life to God.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen  
*Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*  
(Doubleday Image, 1997)

*How can I say “yes” to God’s transforming  
presence in my life now?*

GOD IS CONTINUALLY TRYING to communicate with us if only we will take notice. Mary, the mother of Jesus, listened closely to what the Beloved was singing to her. Luke tells us that she “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51). Mary was acutely attuned to the Holy One’s movement within her. Prayer requires the same from us. When we listen as Mary did, we may not always like what we hear. Attentive listening sometimes turns us in a direction we least expect, as it did for Mary. Being alert and watchful does not guarantee that the content of our prayer will lack struggle and uncertainty. Even the finest of quality praying does not give instant solutions to problems or clear responses to questions.

—Joyce Rupp  
*Prayer* (Orbis, 2007)

*What quality of Mary’s heart do I most desire to have now?*

"His mercy is from age to age  
to those who fear him."

THE PRESENT-DAY MENTALITY, more perhaps than in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of "mercy" seem to cause uneasiness in people, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology never before known in history, have become the masters of the earth and have subdued and dominated it. This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy. Thus, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God.

—Pope St. John Paul II  
*Dives in Misericordia*, #2 (1980)

*What most encourages me to turn more fully to God's mercy?*

JESUS SHOWS US A GOD who goes out of his way to forgive. Can we accept the idea of a God who is so merciful, so forgiving? Whose justice is so mysterious, so hard to decipher by ordinary rules? For some of us, this is difficult to accept. But I think the best way to let go of our own judgmentalism is to remember the boundless mercy of God. Rather than make a list of our own

slips, rather than chronicle our own self-righteousness, we should let go even of judging ourselves. Instead, we should focus on the immeasurable love of God. To remember how deeply God loves us is to feel that we have love to give back, to others and to God.

—Emilie Griffin

*Small Surrenders: A Lenten Journey* (Paraclete Press, 2009)

*What most comforts me about remembering God's mercy?*

"He has shown might with his arm,  
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart."

MARY'S *MAGNIFICAT* is not just a hymn of praise to God. It is that and much more, a manifesto of nonviolence and a call, not to arms, but to disarmament and justice. She publicly proclaims what God is doing in the world—bringing justice to the poor, fulfilling his promise of peace. She testifies that God is a God of mercy, a God of nonviolence, a God of peace. Such serious words cause trouble in our own times, too. Our nonviolence begins as we face the violence within us. It requires that we declare a cease-fire, place our inner violence before our God, reconcile the conflicting sides within us, and make peace with ourselves. It is a daily project that we must undertake for the rest of our lives.

—John Dear

*Mary of Nazareth: Prophet of Peace* (Ave Maria Press, 2003)

*What fears that provoke anger in me do I most need to eliminate?*



SPEAKING IN GOD'S NAME the prophets reject worship that is isolated from life, liturgy separated from justice, prayer detached from daily involvement and faith devoid of works. Amos proclaims that God accepts no rites, feasts, fasts, music or prayers, when outside the sanctuary the righteous are sold for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and the head of the poor is trampled like dust. For Christians, the service of love, consistently connected with faith and liturgy, the commitment to justice, the struggle against any oppression and the protection of personal dignity are choices and acts that have a deeply religious spirit, and are true and proper sacrifices pleasing to God. Living this way, we will continue to bear abundant fruits of justice, freedom and love.

—Pope John Paul II  
*General Audience, 1/10/2001*

*How can I bring God's justice better into  
my dealings with others today?*



"He has thrown down the rulers from their  
thrones but lifted up the lowly."

JESUS CONSISTENTLY DESCRIBES the kingdom as a place where usual values are turned upside down. "The last shall be first." "Blessed are the poor." We have heard these statements many times and probably understood them as pious platitudes about being humble and thinking well of the poor. But in context, these statements suggest living in a different world, where you don't make sense of your life just by making a good living and don't feel fulfilled by being more virtuous or more correct in your understanding of life than others. If you want to live the Jesus way, you do what he did: You live fully on this earth and become profoundly absorbed in secular life, but you also look beyond earthly logic and values and imagine a different order of things.

—Thomas Moore

*Writing in the Sand: Jesus and the Soul of the Gospels* (Hay House, 2009)

*Which of Mary's values have most turned  
my world upside down?*

WE SEE THE PREFERENTIAL BIAS for the poor clearly revealed here in Mary's *Magnificat*. We use the word "bias" intentionally. When you own your bias, then the cards are on the table. The trouble is that those enjoying the benefits of our capitalist system will seldom admit that they have a bias on the other side. This is

not new doctrine, something liberation theology invented. It's very traditional theology. What does it mean? It means the people on the bottom of the system—any system—are usually much more ready to hear the word of God. Longing and thirsting for righteousness, they are more ready to stop protecting the status quo. Therefore they're much more ready for conversion. They have a head start, a symbolic if not real advantage.

—Richard Rohr

*The Good News According to Luke: Spiritual Reflections* (Crossroad, 2002)

*How has my viewpoint most changed  
by listening and responding to God's Word?*



“The hungry he has filled with good things;  
the rich he has sent away empty.”

JESUS BECAME HUMAN to bring good news to the poor and insisted that we love one another as he loves us. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live. We have been created in his image. We have been created to love and be loved. He makes himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the sick one, the one in prison, the lonely one, the unwanted one and he says: You did it to me. He is hungry for our love, and this is the hunger of our poor people. This is the hunger we must find, and it may be right in our own home.

—St. Mother Teresa  
*Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech* (1979)

*What might I most do to become a greater messenger  
of God's peace today?*

FIDELITY TO THE COVENANT will bring a conversion to the poor. If we have experienced God's love for us and if we want to respond according to the spirit of the gospel, we will love in a special way the poor, the afflicted, the exploited, the underprivileged, the hungry. But (and again this is the crux) conversion of heart alone will enable us to pay the price and to make the sacrifices—to lower our standard of living, to share with the

poor, to fight against a system which exploits and terrorizes and oppresses the third world. If we want to love the poor we may have to suffer the loss of everything as did Paul. “Blessed are the poor” takes on a new splendor in our day.

—William Johnston  
*Christian Mysticism Today* (Harper & Row, 1984)

*In what ways can I show my commitment to the poor today?*

“He has helped Israel his servant,  
remembering his mercy,”

ASKING FOR GOD’S MERCY is dictated by love for humanity, for all that is human and which, according to the intuitions of many of our contemporaries, is threatened by an immense danger. The mystery of Christ obliges me to proclaim mercy as God’s merciful love, revealed in that same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world. The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy—the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer—and when she brings people close to the sources of the savior’s mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.

—Pope St. John Paul II  
*Dives in Misericordia*, #13, 15 (1980)

*How might I proclaim and share God’s mercy today?*

THE CHURCH IS COMMISSIONED to announce God's mercy, the beating heart of the gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Church must pattern her behavior after the son of God who went out to everyone without exception. Today, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.

—Pope Francis

*To whom and in what way might I most witness  
to God's mercy in our world today?*



*“according to his promise to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

CHRISTIAN HOPE leads us to consider the example of Abraham, who, as St. Paul tells us, “hoped against hope” (Rom 4:18) in God’s promises. Trusting in the Lord’s word that a son would be born to him, Abraham left his home for a new land. Although the fulfillment of God’s promise was long delayed and seemed to be impossible, Abraham continued to hope. Abraham shows us that sure trust in God’s word does not mean that we will not have moments of uncertainty, disappointment and bewilderment. Hope is always directed to the future, to the fulfillment of God’s promises. May the example of Abraham teach us not be afraid to go out from our own tents, our limited outlooks and to lift our eyes to the stars.

—Pope Francis

*How is God inviting me to participate more  
in the new things God is creating?*

MARY’S ASSUMPTION and Jesus’ Resurrection are about the same mystery: the triumph of God’s justice over human injustice, the victory of grace over sin. The assumption is the glorious culmination of the mystery of God’s preference for what is poor, small, and unprotected in this world, so as to make God’s presence and glory shine there. The virgin of the *Magnificat*, whose message

is that God is exalting the humble and casting down the powerful, finds her life confirmed and glorified by the Father of Jesus. Mary's assumption seen in the light of Jesus' resurrection is hope and promise for the poor of all times and for those who stand in solidarity with them; it is hope and promise that they will share in the final victory of the incarnate God.

—Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer  
*Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Orbis, 1989)

*Which line of Mary's Magnificat most attracts  
and which most challenges me today?*

