

122009 GOD IS NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF SPARING PEOPLE

God did not spare his own Son. There must be a reason. We find it in the Christ child.

I love the story of the Visitation, where Mary the newly conceiving mother-to-be travels “in haste” into the hill country of Judea to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth. I believe that they knew each other and knew each other well. Perhaps Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary’s mother. We will probably never know the exact relationship between the two of them. But as soon as Mary learns from the archangel Gabriel that Elizabeth is pregnant, off she goes. Maybe it was also good for Mary to get out of Nazareth for a while, you know, engaged but pregnant. Tongues wagged then too.

But this second Joyful Mystery always prompts questions from within my heart. Couldn’t God have answered Zechariah and Elizabeth’s prayer a little earlier? Or, would it have been so difficult to hold off Gabriel’s visit to Mary until after she and Joseph were married? But God does not always do what we think the appropriate thing to do. God could have spared them both but did not. Yes, God could have but did not spare them. God does even spare his own Son.

God is not in the business of sparing people. God is in the business of truth—and trust—and love. And because of our disobedience and the hardness of our hearts, God is in the business of forgiveness. But no, we are not spared. What we are, however, is blessed. What is the fruit of Elizabeth’s life of fidelity and persevering prayer? New life—and blessing. And what is the fruit of Mary’s openness to God? New life—and blessing. And it is right there in the reading: “Blessed are you among women.”

Elizabeth recognizes Mary’s blessing because she is so conscious of her own having been blessed. While we are not spared in this life, we are often blessed—daily, weekly, annually. Elizabeth, the elder, and Mary, the younger, help each other. Mary affirms Elizabeth’s fidelity. Elizabeth confirms Mary’s openness to the Holy Spirit and her surrender to God. Both give. Both receive. And in the process, both are blessed but neither is spared nor will be spared.

We have expressions that we use that encapsulate little bits of wisdom. We say things like: “Timing is everything.” Or, “It’s the little things that count.” Yes. But can we accept God’s timing and let go of our own timetable? And can we content ourselves with the little things and the blessings they bring into our lives? A visit, friendship, words of affirmation, an embrace, faithful prayer. Can we sense the blessing in these little things? It is imperative that we learn to do so because if we cannot accept God’s timing or recognize God’s grace in the little things—how can we expect to enter into the joy that is Christmas?