

Assumption

15 August 2021 Ballyvaloo

Welcome

Our Gospel today celebrates Mary as a hearer of the Word. Many years ago, an English Dominican, Brian Davies, asked the question: where is the word of God to be found. He gave a nuanced answer: the word of God is to be found *chiefly* in the Scriptures. So, in the Scriptures, yes, but not only. We find a word of God in other writings of holy men and women, in nature, in the people in my life and more simply in what happens. There is also a word of God deep in each one of us, in the hungers of the heart and in the still small voice of conscience. In a way, we are, like Mary, constantly “hearers of the Word.”

Topic

The practice of *Lectio Divina* is grounded on this very conviction. And in *Lectio*, we use our experience to enter into the word and, in turn, the word helps us to recognise what is going on in our lives.

Steps

We started last night by noticing what the reading from Philippians evoked in us. That could be anything: a feeling, a reaction, a memory, a relationship. Did the reading conjure up a special time in my life? Who are the people I have prayed for who came to mind? As I heard the reading, what was it that “flashed upon the inward eye,” the internal cinema of memories?

This is an important starting point for *Lectio* and with practice it can be very rich. The good news here is that the older you are the more compendious the bank of memories to draw upon. Such recollections are a kind of springboard allowing me to enter the reading personally and, in turn, the Scriptures help me to recognise and read what is going on in my life, both in the past and in the present.

Two small examples may help. We notice that Paul’s prayer is intense, constant and connected. The people he serves and loves are part of his relationship with God and he comes before God in communion with others. We all do that, especially when we pray for people in any kind of trouble or difficulty. Such prayer is, of its nature, a bit of a mystery. We know it is not mechanical – as if somehow we were persuading God to be better! – but we also know it is right as we hold other in our heart in the Presence. Our everyday relationships are part of our relationship with God and we do not at all come before God alone. And so, we continue to pray with and pray for others and they for us.

In Philippians and in Luke, you may have noticed similar expressions. Paul puts it thus: “the one who began a good work in you” and on the lips of Mary we hear “the mighty one has done great things for me.” Both Paul and Luke invite us to look at our own lives: what is the good work God is achieving in me? Can I name the great things? Looking back on the pattern of my life, perhaps there are outstanding people or moments which led to a real turning point? I’m really asking what is God bringing about through me? We

catch glimpses of this with the 20:20 vision of retrospection. But we also bring it into the the present moment: what is God bringing about in me *now*? Or more concretely, what is God asking of me at this moment in my life? Such reflections spill over naturally into a recognition of grace (*charis*) and and a spontaneous thanksgiving (*eucharistia*).

Conclusion

So, as we celebrate today Mary as the exemplary hearers of the word, we see ourselves as well. We are constantly hearers of the word: in life, in others, in nature, in poetry, in Scriptures and above all with others. As St Paul says in Romans,

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it p "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we preach), because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. (Romans 10:6-10)