



Magnificat

"My soul glorifies the Lord"



My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

now reached the end of this pilgrimage through the texts, similar to a stroll in a garden filled with flowers of praise, invocation, prayer and contemplation, let us now make room for that Canticle which seals in spirit every celebration of Vespers: the Magnificat (Lk 1: 46-55).

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm
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.

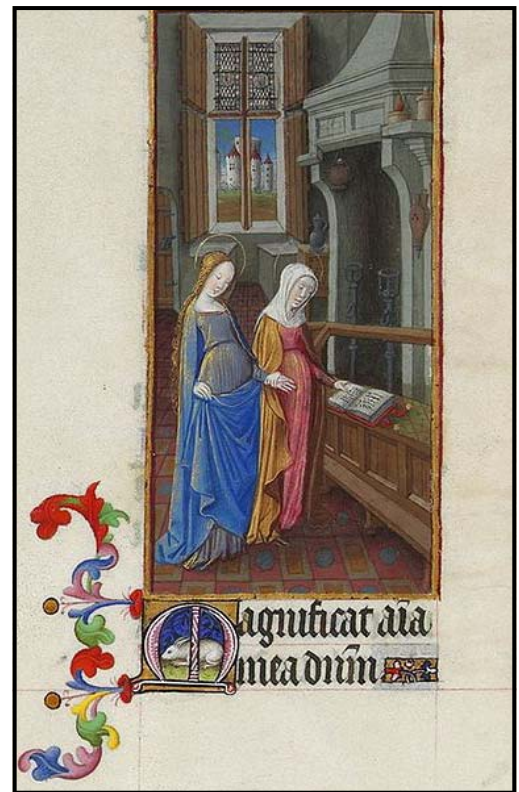
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he has made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen



1. We have now arrived at the final destination of the long journey begun exactly five years ago in Spring 2001, by my beloved Predecessor, the unforgettable Pope John Paul II. In his Catecheses, the great Pope wanted to cover the whole sequence of the Psalms and Canticles that constitute the fundamental prayerful fabric of the Liturgy of Lauds and Vespers. Having



It is a canticle that reveals in filigree the spirituality of the biblical anawim, that is, of those faithful who not only recognize themselves as "poor" in the detachment from all idolatry of riches and power, but also in the profound humility of a heart emptied of the temptation to pride and open to the bursting in of the divine saving grace. Indeed, the whole Magnificat, which we have just heard the Sistine Chapel Choir sing, is marked by this "humility", in Greek tapeinosis, which indicates a situation of material humility and poverty.

2. The first part of the Marian canticle (cf. Lk 1: 46-50) is a sort of solo voice that rises to Heaven to reach the Lord. The constant resonance of the first person should be noted: "My soul... my spirit... my Saviour... has done great things for me... [they] will call me



blessed...". So it is that the soul of the prayer is the celebration of the divine grace which has burst into the heart and life of Mary, making her Mother of the Lord. We hear the Virgin's own voice speaking of her Saviour who has done great things in her soul and body.

The intimate structure of her prayerful canticle, therefore, is praise, thanksgiving and grateful joy. But this personal witness is neither solitary nor intimistic, purely individualistic, because the Virgin Mother is aware that she has a mission to fulfil for humanity and her experience fits into the history of salvation.

She can thus say: "And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation" (v. 50). With this praise of the Lord, Our Lady gives a voice to all redeemed creatures, who find in her "fiat", and thus in the figure of Jesus, born of the Virgin, the mercy of God.



3. It is at this point that the second poetic and spiritual part of the Magnificat unfolds (cf. vv. 51-55). It has a more choral tone, almost as if the voices of the whole community of the faithful were associated with Mary's voice, celebrating God's amazing decision.

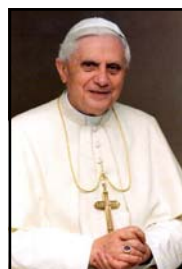
In the original Greek of Luke's Gospel, we have seven aorist verbs that indicate the same number of actions which the Lord carries out repeatedly in history: "He has shown strength... he has scattered the proud... he has put down the mighty... he has exalted those of low degree... he has filled the hungry with good things... the rich he has sent empty away... he has helped... Israel".

In these seven divine acts, the "style" that inspires the behaviour of the Lord of history stands out: he takes the part of the lowly. His plan is one that is often hidden beneath the opaque context of human events that see "the proud, the mighty and the rich" triumph.

Yet his secret strength is destined in the end to be revealed, to show who God's true favourites are: "Those who fear him", faithful to his words: "those of low degree", "the hungry", "his servant Israel!"; in other words, the community of the People of God who, like Mary, consist of people who are "poor", pure and simple of heart. It is that "little flock" which is told not to fear, for the Lord has been pleased to give it his Kingdom (cf. Lk 12: 32). And this Canticle invites us to join the tiny flock and the true members of the People of God in purity and simplicity of heart, in God's love.

4. Let us therefore accept the invitation that St Ambrose, the great Doctor of the Church, addresses to us in his commentary on the text of the Magnificat: "May Mary's soul be in each one to magnify the Lord, may Mary's spirit be in each one to rejoice in God; if, according to the flesh, the Mother of Christ is one alone, according to the faith all souls bring forth Christ; each, in fact, welcomes the Word of God within.... Mary's soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God because, consecrated in soul and spirit to the Father and to the Son, she adores with devout affection one God, from whom come all things and only one Lord, by virtue of whom all things exist" (Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke, 2: 26-27: SAEMO, XI, Milan-Rome, 1978, p. 169).

In this marvellous commentary on the Magnificat by St Ambrose, I am always especially moved by the surprising words: "If, according to the flesh the Mother of Christ is one alone, according to the faith all souls bring forth Christ: indeed, each one intimately welcomes the Word of God". Thus, interpreting Our Lady's very words, the Holy Doctor invites us to ensure that the Lord can find a dwelling place in our own souls and lives. Not only must we carry him in our hearts, but we must bring him to the world, so that we too can bring forth Christ for our epoch. Let us pray the Lord to help us praise him with Mary's spirit and soul, and to bring Christ back to our world.



Pope Benedict XVI
15 February 2006
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060215_en.html