

Mary had gone to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Both had been blessed with miraculous pregnancies. Elizabeth, childless her entire life, had finally been able to conceive and was about to give birth to the forerunner of the Christ, whom we spoke about a few weeks ago. Mary had conceived while still a virgin and was going to bear a son who would be the savior of all people. When Mary came to the house, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy. The unborn baby recognized that his savior was there. Elizabeth was honored, she praised Mary for the role Mary was about to play in history, the mother of the Lord. She pointed out how great a blessing it was for her to be chosen for this honor. She praised Mary's faith in trusting God to fulfill his promises to her. And Mary, after receiving this great welcome and praise, responded with what we have come to call the Song of Mary.

<read Luke 1:46-55>

"My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior!" Compare this to what you might say in a similar situation. No seriously, here you are, the chosen of God and someone takes it upon themselves to lavish you with all kinds of praise for your role in everything. "Oh, no, you're too kind." It is, after all, human nature to be selfish and egotistical. Our primary reaction in almost every situation is to think first or only about ourselves. Sure we do lots of things that look kind or generous or selfless, but there's always some kind of selfish motivation, something that we want or hope to get out of the situation. Every inclination of the human heart is only evil all the time.

And yet, that same heart accuses us. The heart tells us we have sinned. Every human being has God's law written on the heart in the conscience. The conscience whispers when we let things get too quiet around us, in the dead of night when we can't sleep and accuses us. You're wrong. You're a failure. You are not good enough. I could shoot out examples at you but you know exactly which bits of pride or arrogance or laziness and selfishness you are most guilty of. You know better than anyone else what that voice whispers. Everyone has this accuser within, and so deep down we all know we've done wrong. But what is the solution we lash back with? To look to ourselves for the answer. It's time to try harder! I'll do better next time! In fact, I'll do more good to balance out the wrong! And for some, it feels like it's helping. They fool the conscience into thinking they've done well and now everything is okay.

But it's not okay, is it? Mary says in her song that God scatters those who are proud in their hearts, who think that they don't need anyone else or any help to take care of themselves. In fact by thinking that we could somehow make things right by our own power we've only made things worse. God's law clearly tells us that **"The soul who sins is the one who will die."** (Ez 18:20). Not the soul who sins more than a certain amount. Not the soul who sins and doesn't make up for it. Not the soul who sins more than they do good. No, the soul who sins is the one who will die. For all our sins, for our actions and words and thoughts, we all deserve death. For trying to somehow earn our salvation and work our way to being right with God, thinking that we didn't need him, we deserve death. Once we abandon any foolish notion that we can play any part in saving ourselves and throw ourselves on the mercy of God alone, then we are able to be saved.

Our natural reaction to praise like Mary received might be to soak it all in, but Mary's response was not one of selfishness. Instead, she immediately glorified the Lord. And it is in God, not ourselves that we find salvation. **"The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name."** God alone has done everything for you. God alone determined our plan for salvation, and God alone carried it out. He worked and shaped history so that everything would be ready for him to come to earth as a human being. So that **"when the time had fully come, he sent his son..."** (Gal 4:4). That son was about to be born to Mary. Mary, who was chosen for no reason other than God chose her. Not for any reason in herself that merited this treatment from God. Mary who needed this savior as much as anyone else. And when Jesus allowed himself to be put on the cross, God's love for his creation and God's anger toward our sin met perfectly and through no action of our own, our debt to God was paid. It was not done because God liked something about us, something that we did, God did not love us because we gave him any reason to. God loved us enough to die for us simply because he chose to.

And the thing that connects us to God's love, to receive this amazing gift is simply faith. Simply a trust in God for the forgiveness of sins. But as I said earlier, it is the inclination of our hearts to trust only in ourselves, to think only about ourselves. And we have no way to fight against the inclination of our heart. So God takes care of that too. God comes to us through the word and works on our hearts and creates faith, and turns toward God. For **"...no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Cor 12:3).

So God has done everything for us. He has paid for our sins and he has brought us to faith, giving us the means to receive that forgiveness. But he does not stop there. God alone provides for us daily. It is God who works nature to

ensure that the world gives forth food for us to eat and resources to have for clothing and shelter. God alone who has given you the strength and the skills and the health and the opportunities to receive your daily bread. God provides for us what we need and for most of us well beyond what we need. Everything we have here on earth is provided for us by God alone. God watches over us and protects and cares for us. And so we see that like Mary, all our thanks and all our praise should be to God alone. He has truly done great things for us. It's really all about God.

But it's not so easy as all that is it? In fact it's a constant struggle to keep our God as the primary focus in our lives. To rely on God entirely for help in times of trouble and to trust that he is using all things for our benefit. To rely entirely on him for our salvation. Yes, our hearts have been changed and we have been made alive through the Holy Spirit...but we still have a sinful nature. We still have that part of ourselves that wants to rely only on ourselves in every situation. Which nature wins out for you? When we fall back into sin and give in to temptation, how do we respond? Do we shake a finger at ourselves on the inside, and say "No! You're not supposed to do that!"? And when it happens again we reprimand ourselves further, "That is wrong! You need to stop doing that!" And after the third time we gather up all our strength and say to ourselves, "Seriously, that was the last time, you're never doing that again." Until it happens again.

It will never work because our strength is insufficient to overcome. Just like trying to save ourselves by our own works doesn't work, digging inside for the strength to overcome sin only digs the pit deeper. How often, instead, do we ask God to be our help and our guide in life? Is it God alone whom we look to for help and guidance every day of our life? Or does it take the most dire of circumstances to happen before we even remember he's there to help us? Only when things are at their worst do we turn and ask for his assistance, for everything else, we've got it covered, we can do it ourselves and like the stubborn five-year-old we defiantly shout, "No! I can do it myself!"

And does God receive from us all the honor and glory and praise in our lives for everything he's done? We're perfectly content to accept praise and thanks from other people for all the stuff we've accomplished, but do we give God his due? God who gave you your abilities and health and treasures and put you in the right place to do those things. When people compliment us do we give God his due? Do we take time to thank him for everything he's done for us every day? Everything we do and everything that happens to us is all by and through him. Do we recognize that it's all about God? Do we give him the credit he deserves for it all?

It's easy to see that even though God has done so much for us and even given us the ability to rely solely on him, that sinful nature is still powerful in pulling us away from focusing on God alone. God alone is our strength in temptation, God alone is our help in all things and God alone deserves all of our thanks and praise. And God alone can grant you the power to do recognize these things and live them. Through his holy word he does just that. The Holy Spirit strengthens us through the word and sacraments. The more we are in the word, the more we study it regularly the better we get at overcoming our selfish nature and trusting in God alone for everything. And the blessings for doing so are amazing. As Mary said "**His mercy extends to those who fear him.**" By relying solely on God and not on ourselves we will overcome temptation and not fall into sins that damage and harm us, we will be content with the blessings God has given us knowing that he provides for us in all things, and we will live free of worry and fear, knowing that God has all things under his control and that he is working everything, the good and the bad, for our own best interest. That gives a lasting peace unlike anything the world can hope to offer. We will truly be able to say with Mary, "**My spirit rejoices in God my savior!**"

With our lives in focus there are no doubts about what we are doing or where our life is going. We can look and see that our life is really about God and our relationship with him. God is not just part of our life, something we do on Sunday once in a while, pay our dues to and then go about the rest of our life during the week. No, as Christians God *is* our life. Your life is about your God. Everything else in your life; family, job, relationships, recreation are all things done under the umbrella of your connection to your God. After all, this life will boil down to one of two options when you are done; heaven or hell. God alone will make that determination and God alone has given you everything to grant you entry to heaven. It is on that last day of judgment that it will be finally fulfilled as Mary said, the rulers will be brought down from their thrones and the humble will be lifted up. Those who are proud in their hearts, those who think that they need nothing to do with God, they are the ones who will be scattered, but those who are humble, who trust in God before themselves, they will be lifted up to eternal glory in heaven. So keep God alone as your focus...keep yourself humble before him, trust him before yourself in *everything*. Use the word and sacraments to strengthen your trust in him so that you can live in peace now and on the last day God will lift you up to be with him in heaven forever.

God alone has done everything for you, he has paid for your sins, brought you to faith and given you everything you need here and now. Put your trust entirely in him. Give him all the glory. Look at your life and see it's all about God. Amen.