



*Blessed are you
among women*

Luke 1:42

Mike Moyers

TRULY OUR SISTER

In 1974 Pope Paul VI issued *Marialis Cultis*, a document on devotion to Mary. He wrote that Mary is *truly our sister, who as a poor and humble woman fully shared our lot.* (n 56). As a Jewish woman Mary inherited the faith in God beginning with Abraham and Sarah onwards. The God who heard the cries of the poor and who liberated the people of Israel from Egypt and formed a covenant relationship with them.

Mary and Joseph would have practiced their Jewish religion in their home as Jews do today, followed Torah, (the first five books of the bible), observed Shabbat, Jewish festivals, recited prayers, lighted candles and gone to synagogue which was the custom in Nazareth. Luke's account of Jesus reading in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16-20) indicates that this was part of his family life. Mary and Joseph would also have known the oppression and poverty of living in an occupied territory with taxes imposed by Rome, the Temple and Herod.

MARY'S PROPHETIC SONG

The readings for this fourth Sunday of Advent include Hannah's Song from the first book of Samuel and the first part of Luke's account of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The Gospel for Wednesday of this week includes Mary's prophetic song, known as the Magnificat. The Magnificat is part of the Evening Prayer of the Church; during the seven days before Christmas it is prayed with the O Antiphons.

<https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/o-antiphons-advent>

THE OLDEST ADVENT HYMN

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian killed by the Nazis wrote in a 1933 sermon:

The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out here.

This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind. These are the tones of the women prophets of the Old Testament that now come to life in Mary's mouth.

Mary stands in the long Jewish tradition of women singers, from Miriam with her tambourine (*Exodus 15:2-21*) to Deborah (*Judges 5:1-31*) Hannah (*1 Samuel 2:1-10*) and Judith (*Judith 16:1-17*), who also sang songs of salvation, victorious songs of the oppressed.

The powerful hope of Mary's song speaks strongly to poor and oppressed people. Sr Susan Connelly who continues to be a voice for the oppressed wrote:

The Magnificat is quite a subversive song, so much so that during the 1980s the government of Guatemala banned its public recitation. When the evangelical Anglican missionary Henry Martyn went out to Calcutta as chaplain to the East India Company in 1805, he was appalled to discover that the British authorities had banned the recitation of the Magnificat at Evensong.the Magnificat was banned in Argentina after the Mothers of the Disappeared used it to call for nonviolent resistance to the ruling military junta in mid-1970s'.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MIGRANTS

This day falls during Advent, this year on Saturday 18 December. In his first year as Pope, Pope Francis prayed at Lampedusa, the place where many migrants still drown in desperation. In his address, he said:

Who among us has wept for these things, and things like this?' Who has wept for the deaths of these brothers and sisters? Who has wept for the people who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who wanted something to support their families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of 'suffering with': the globalisation of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!

The Scripture readings during the Octave of Christmas include the account of Mary, Joseph and Jesus having to flee as refugees to protect Jesus. This is part of the

Christmas story. Fr Khalid Marogi, Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, describes the experience of having to flee your home country:

"Within days, or even hours, violent oppressors will occupy your town centre." For refugees around the world, this scenario typifies an immediate threat. With no time to respond, they abandon livelihood, community and homeland to escape civil war, political unrest, religious persecution, effects of climate change and exploitation or systematic abuse of basic human rights. Their desperate attempts to find refuge are often not final solutions but new beginnings. A long journey into the unknown is marked by fear, danger and daunting obstacles.

Mid-2020 data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that world-wide numbers of forcibly displaced people surpassed 80 million. According to their statistics, 26.3 million were refugees, an additional 4.2 million were recorded as asylum-seekers and tens of millions of others classified as internally displaced or stateless.

GLOBAL INDIFFERENCE

Pope Francis often refers to the 'globalisation of indifference' especially in *Fratelli tutti*. The Magnificat, the O Antiphons and the prayer from *Fratelli tutti* might be three prayers for this Fourth week of Advent.

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognise the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.