

CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL ASSISTANTS, SFO - OCEANIA

c/- Star of the Sea Friary Phone: (61-2) 9369 9361
45 Victoria St, Waverley NSW Fax: (61-2) 9389 4067
Australia 2024 E-mail:cschafer@franciscans.org.au

Year 12, No5 ***Monthly Spiritual Message*** May 2012-133

OUR LADY OF THE VISITATION

The second Joyful Mystery of the Holy Rosary and of the Franciscan Crown is the Visitation. In this mystery, we contemplate the charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in visiting her cousin Elisabeth, who was carrying John the Baptist within her womb. On the 31st of May, we observe this feast of Our Lady, to conclude the month of May, which is kept traditionally as the Month dedicated to the Mother of God.

The details of this event in the life of Our Lord and His Mother are recorded in the Gospel of St Luke, Chapter 1, verses 39 to 56. St Luke tells us himself at the beginning of the Gospel that, to obtain these details, he interviewed eye witnesses of Christ and those who knew the Lord, which of course included the Blessed Virgin herself.

The Feast of the Visitation had been kept by the Franciscan Order until it was extended to the rest of the Church by Pope Urban V in 1389. It is a beautiful reminder to us all that we are all called to bring Christ to others as Our Lady was, through the example of our works and words.

This feast reminds us that through Confirmation we received the sacramental graces of the Holy Spirit, to live our baptism fully, so as to give witness to Christ with the help of Our Lady.

In today's society, we need the courage, which the Holy Spirit gives us, to be faithful to our Catholic faith and not to betray our Lord for worldly gain or popularity. Unfortunately, there are Catholics, such as some in politics, who have betrayed Christ by refusing to stand up against abortion, to defend the Christian understanding of marriage and family or to defend the poor, the sick, the elderly and refugees. Let us pray that we will be faithful to Christ the King and uphold His Kingdom.

Our Lady, after being told by the Archangel that Elizabeth is to have a child, hastens to visit her. After the long journey (over 90 miles, which would have taken over ten days), the Blessed Virgin comes to the residence of her cousin, which today is the Church of the Visitation in Ein Karem, west of Jerusalem. The Church, rebuilt in 1955, is cared for by the Franciscan friars.

St Elizabeth honours her kinswoman as the Mother of her Lord, who marks the beginning of the redeemed humanity. John the Baptist, as an unborn baby, greets the arrival of the unborn Redeemer and moves within his mother's womb with joy in the presence of the Son of God within the womb of the Virgin Mary. John and Elizabeth, his mother, represent the longing of Israel, for the coming of the Saviour, and Elizabeth recognises Mary as the Mother of God for her role within our salvation.

Mary carries God incarnate within her womb, and today as Mother of the Church. She carries our prayers and requests to Christ by her maternal intercession. John is sanctified by the Lamb of God as they are united in the embrace of their mothers. Our Lady responds with her hymn of thanksgiving for the mercy of God. This is the Magnificat, which is recited or sung daily in Evening Prayer (Vespers), the official prayer of the Church. *“Henceforth all ages will call me blessed.”*

In profound humility, the Immaculate Virgin carrying her unborn Lord and Redeemer, foretells the honour that the Church, the new Israel, will accord to her throughout history.

After the birth of John, Our Lady left the house of Zachariah and Elizabeth and returned to Nazareth. As Franciscans, let us always promote an authentic love for the Mother of God. St Maximilian Kolbe calls the Marian devotion and defence of the Immaculate Conception “the golden thread” of the Franciscan tradition, Let us imitate her virtues, seek her intercession, and be faithful to Her Son and His Church, especially in defending the sanctity of the unborn.

We honour You, O Holy Virgin Mary, the bearer of our God and King. May we imitate your charity in bringing the mercy of your Son to those whom we meet each day.

Br Louis Schmid OFM Conv
National Spiritual Assistant OFS-Oceania