

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
NEW YORK CATHOLIC BIBLE SUMMIT
NEW YORK CATHOLIC CENTER/CATHEDRAL HIGH SCHOOL
SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 2017**

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we have just heard the proclamation of God's Word, which must now be brought to the whole world! I wish to thank Mario Paredes, Sister Joan Curtin, Maureen McKew, and Oscar Cruz for their kind invitation. As the Papal Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative in the United States, I wish to extend to all present the warm greetings, paternal affection, and spiritual closeness of His Holiness Pope Francis.

At this liturgy, we are celebrating a Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Cause of Our Joy! Yes, Mary is the cause of our joy because she conceived and gave birth to the Messiah, who brings joy to the whole world. At his birth, Jesus brought joy to the shepherds. At His Resurrection, his disciples rejoiced to see Him. When He departed from this earth at His Ascension, He left his disciples "with great joy."

Finally, when He was seated at the right hand of the Father, the Spirit of Joy, the Holy Spirit, was sent upon the Apostles and filled the whole Church with joy, as they went forth to preach the Good News of Salvation. This joy was made possible, because Mary, the first and model disciple, said Yes to God. She is not only the cause of our joy but a model of joyful, missionary discipleship.

In our first reading, we heard uplifting words from Isaiah to the People who had returned home from exile in Babylon. Isaiah encourages them to wait and to trust in the Lord. The remnant of Israel is a sign that God does not abandon His People, despite their past infidelities. They will be a sign of the presence of God in the midst of other nations. They will be a living reminder that God has a plan to save His people. Isaiah praises the Lord, saying, "*my soul will rejoice in my God for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he had covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bridegroom adorns herself with her jewels.*"

Through this remnant others will recognize God's saving deeds. It will not only be future generations of Israelites who will recognize God's presence and fidelity; rather, it will be *all* nations. While God calls individuals to be His own and to be His disciples, He also calls them to go out to encounter others, opening a spectrum of possibilities for the saving power of God. From Isaiah emerges a hope that all might experience the joy of salvation.

This hope was carried by the Blessed Virgin, a daughter of Zion, who became an instrument of salvation – of joy – for the whole world. She is a model disciple. Like the people of Israel, who were invited by Isaiah to wait and trust in the Lord, Mary waited and trusted; when asked to bear the Son of God, she gave us an example of humble discipleship, describing herself as the *lowly handmaid of the Lord*. Then she gave her consent: "*Let it be done to me according to your Word.*" Mary provides an example of surrendering to God's will – another hallmark of discipleship. She is open to the Spirit of God, who overshadows her and fills her with joy!

As a disciple who has been *clothed with a robe of salvation* and *robed in a mantle of justice*, she goes forth on her mission. Just as the people were meant to be an instrument of salvation for the nations, now Mary becomes an instrument of salvation for others, going in haste

to visit Elizabeth. She is a missionary disciple, bringing Good News to the whole world, beginning with Elizabeth!

Mary, the New Ark of the Covenant, carries within her the living God. Just as the nations were to recognize God's presence through the People of Israel, Elizabeth and the child in her womb recognize the Divine Presence. The child leaps for joy!

The Holy Father expressed it this way in his Chrism Mass homily:

"Mary is the new wineskin brimming with contagious joy. She is the 'handmaid of the Father who sings his praises', Our Lady of Prompt Succor, who, after conceiving in her immaculate womb the Word of life, goes out to visit and assist her cousin Elizabeth. Her contagious 'fullness' helps us overcome the temptation and fear, the temptation to a faint-heartedness that holds us back from going forth to fill others with joy. This cannot be, for 'the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus' (*Evangelli Gaudium*, 1)". (Pope Francis, Homily, Chrism Mass, 13 April 2017)

Saint Ambrose says, "There is nothing slow about the Holy Spirit." (Exposition on the Gospel of Luke, II, 19: *PL* 15, 1560) Mary went in haste, with a prophetic Spirit, bearing the Savior within her on a mission of love and communion. There are some things in life which simply cannot be put off – forgiving others, receiving healing, being reconciled. There are some things which have an urgency to them – caring for the poor, the sick, and the elderly or even saying to a family member, "I love you."

This is how we sometimes communicate God's Word – through our words and actions! The essence of being a disciple is to believe, to love, and to bring God to others which involves encounter the other in need. This is our challenge today- the imitation of Mary's discipleship in our daily lives.

Yes, there is an urgency to our mission – to bringing about encounters throughout the whole world with the Word of God! Being a Catholic or a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice, following rules, or complicated ideas, but it is a result an encounter with an event, a person – the person of Jesus Christ– which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

Mary went forth in haste so that Elizabeth and John the Baptist could *encounter* the Savior who brings us joy. She was the Cause of their Joy and is the Cause of our Joy too! May she intercede for us, so that overcoming our faint-heartedness and fear, we too may bring God's Word to the entire world!