



Message

September 8, 2023

Dear Sisters,

“O Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of God, pray for us now that we too may experience a new Pentecost during the synod. May we continue to bear fruits in communion, with participation, and for mission.”

As we look forward to the big event in our Church this coming October, the Synod on Synodality, we turn our gaze to Mary, the mother and role model of the synodal Church. On the feast of her Nativity, let us pray that we may be permeated by her example and presence to inspire us to embrace synodality with enthusiasm and dedication, knowing that as we journey together in unity, we are participating in the ongoing renewal of the Church for the greater glory of God.

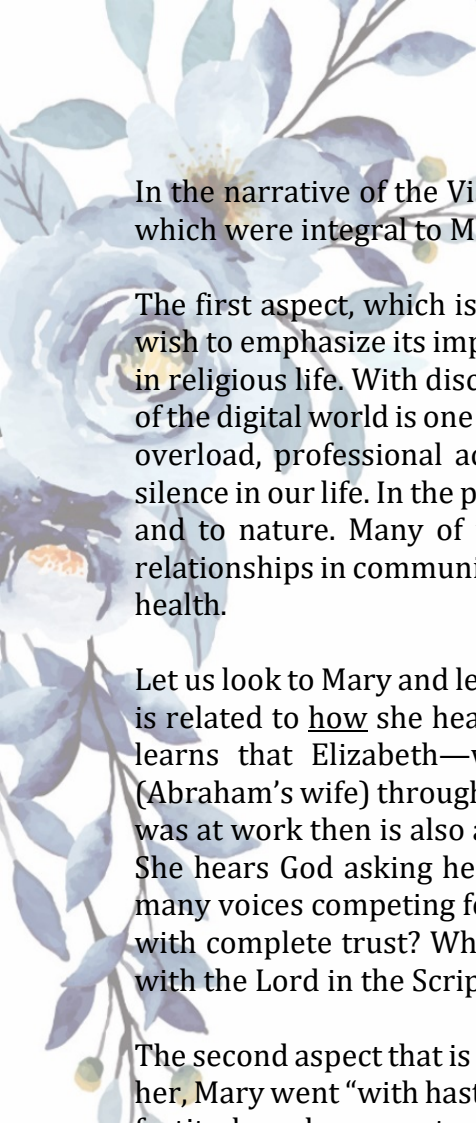
In contemplating the theme of Mary and Synodality, we are reminded of the profound significance of both in our lives as consecrated women. Our Book of Life clearly states that Mary, who embodies grace and humility, exemplifies to us “deep faith and complete trust, absolute conformity to the plan of God, perfect participation in the mystery of salvation, thoughtful, warm-hearted service to others.”¹

Mary reminds us of the central message of synodality in a serene but compelling way. She does not speak. She only needs to direct our gaze to her Son. “But in her wordless gesture, she sums up the whole mission of the Church.”² Mary’s whole life is, in fact, a synodal journey. But let us explore together the core message of synodality through the Visitation account in the Gospel of Luke. In a symbolic way, Mary’s willingness to undertake the journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth can be seen as a procession towards the Church. Mary, who bears the presence of Christ within her, embodies the Church; while Elizabeth represents the faithful community eagerly waiting for the coming of the Messiah. In this context, Mary’s physical journey becomes a powerful sign of the Church’s mission to bring Christ to our brothers and sisters and to unite the community of believers in bonds of friendship, solidarity, and mutual support. Through the sharing of their faith, joys, hopes, and dreams, the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth becomes a beautiful experience of synodality. It brings about the essence of synodality: the coming together to celebrate our faith and to offer mutual support on our spiritual journey.

¹ Book of Life, #5.

² Towards a Spirituality for Synodality, p. 45.





In the narrative of the Visitation, we can perceive three essential aspects of journeying together which were integral to Mary's life. These are: discernment, courage, and a sense of mission.

The first aspect, which is **discernment**, is perhaps the most talked about topic these days. But I wish to emphasize its importance given the context of our world today and the challenges we face in religious life. With discernment comes silence, attentive listening, and dialogue. The landscape of the digital world is one that encourages multitasking demands of packed schedules, information overload, professional achievements, and many others. There seems to be no more space for silence in our life. In the process, we hardly learn how to truly listen to God, to ourselves, to others, and to nature. Many of us have developed the "workaholic" syndrome at the expense of our relationships in community and in ministry and to the detriment of our own spiritual and physical health.

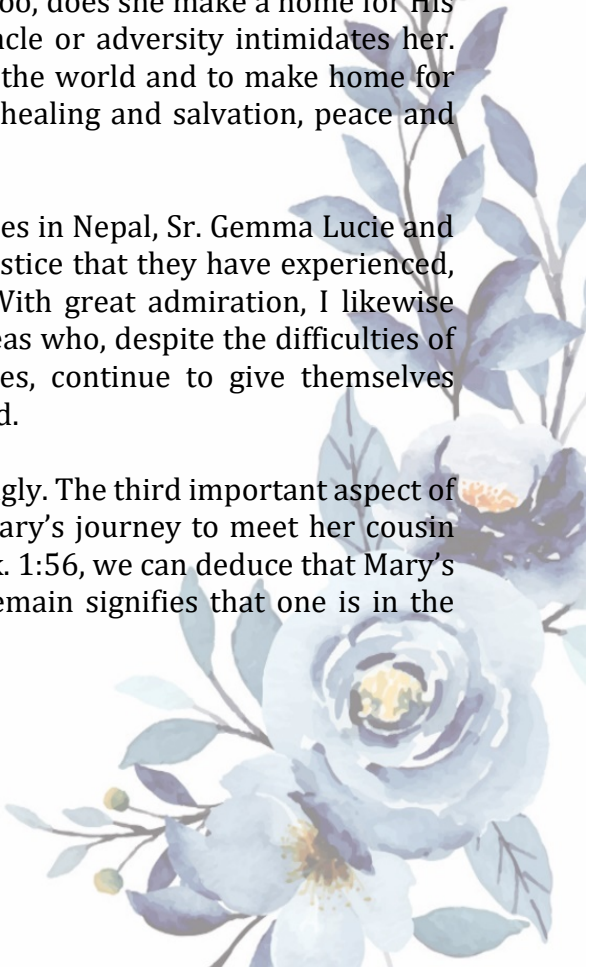
Let us look to Mary and learn from her how to truly listen. As a woman of listening, what she hears is related to how she hears, and how she hears is connected to whom she hears. So, when Mary learns that Elizabeth—who is old and barren—has conceived a child, she hears "Sarah" (Abraham's wife) through a memory alive with the Scripture. She hears God's voice—the one who was at work then is also at work now in her life: "For nothing is impossible with God." (Lk. 1:37) She hears God asking her to trust, and she utters an unwavering yes. How about us? From the many voices competing for our attention, are we able to hear God's voice? Do we respond to Him with complete trust? What memories are kept alive in us? Are they memories of our encounter with the Lord in the Scriptures or memories from social media?

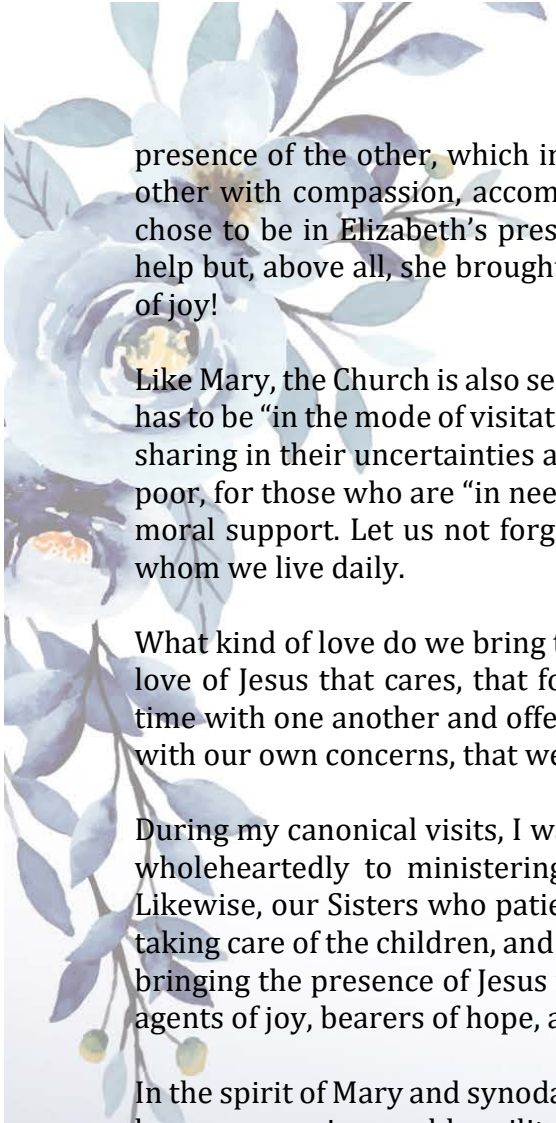
The second aspect that is essential in our synodal journey is **courage**. After the angel departs from her, Mary went "with haste" to her cousin Elizabeth. She is ready to respond to God's Word. Mary's fortitude and courage to make big life commitments shine through when she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God, even if she did not fully comprehend what it entails. She can be a great inspiration when God calls us to do big things, when we cannot rely on our own understanding or ability but rather put our trust and confidence in a loving God. For Mary, courage also comes from the fact that she is a mother. As she made a home for Jesus, so too, does she make a home for His disciples and all who follow Him. Nothing stops her, no obstacle or adversity intimidates her. Following the example of Mary, let us "learn to be at home in the world and to make home for those who are seeking home, a place of welcome and refuge, healing and salvation, peace and reconciliation."³

Mary's courageous response reminds me of our two missionaries in Nepal, Sr. Gemma Lucie and Sr. Martha, who, despite the horrors of imprisonment and injustice that they have experienced, chose to stay and continue to serve God's people in Nepal. With great admiration, I likewise acknowledge our other missionaries in challenging mission areas who, despite the difficulties of adjustment in terms of culture, climate, beliefs, and practices, continue to give themselves wholeheartedly, knowing that we all belong to one family of God.

Mary does not only hear the Word of God; she also acts accordingly. The third important aspect of our synodal journey is a **sense of mission**. The purpose of Mary's journey to meet her cousin Elizabeth is not explicitly given in the Gospel. However, from Lk. 1:56, we can deduce that Mary's purpose was to 'dwell' or to 'remain' there. To dwell or to remain signifies that one is in the

³ Ibid., p.57.





presence of the other, which implies “spending quality time with one another, listening to each other with compassion, accompanying, encouraging, and offering comforting presence.”⁴ Mary chose to be in Elizabeth’s presence. In visiting her, the Virgin Mary brought not only material help but, above all, she brought Jesus. Bringing Jesus into that house meant bringing the fullness of joy!

Like Mary, the Church is also sent to bring Christ and his Gospel to all. A synodal Church in mission has to be “in the mode of visitation,” serving others, partaking in their joys and vulnerabilities, and sharing in their uncertainties and dreams for the future. Mission always involves passion for the poor, for those who are “in need,” not only of material things but also of spiritual, emotional, and moral support. Let us not forget that those “in need” may just be in our midst, the Sisters with whom we live daily.

What kind of love do we bring to those we minister and to our Sisters in the community? Is it the love of Jesus that cares, that forgives, that accompanies, that encourages? Do we spend quality time with one another and offer each other our comforting presence? Or are we too preoccupied with our own concerns, that we do not even notice the persons around us?

During my canonical visits, I was often moved by the witness of our Sisters who give themselves wholeheartedly to ministering to the needs of the poor and marginalized in remote areas. Likewise, our Sisters who patiently visit the homebound sick and elderly, those who spend time taking care of the children, and those who are ministering to the youth. Sisters, let us never tire of bringing the presence of Jesus wherever we are. In our own little ways, let us do our share to be agents of joy, bearers of hope, and instruments of peace in our wounded world.

In the spirit of Mary and synodality, let us continue to walk together, supporting one another with love, compassion, and humility. We implore Mary to teach us how to listen with the “ear of our hearts,” to have the courage to make and fulfill our commitments, and to have a strong sense of mission.

“Lord grant us your grace and your strength, so that the model of Mary, Mother of the Church, may be reflected in our lives and in the life of every ecclesial community.”

Affectionately in our Lady,

S. Maria Goulli Lee
Superior General



⁴ Capitular Acts 2019, p. 27