

Magnificat!

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

The Blessed Virgin Mary (transferred)

13 August 2017

The Dean of St Edmundsbury

Those familiar words – the Magnificat. Our gospel reading – perhaps repeated more often than any other gospel passage. For if you come at all regularly to evensong you will hear them, and after a little time, they become part of our internal repertoire of words to draw upon in times of joy, of trouble, of anger, of need for comfort. The Magnificat – my soul magnifies the Lord – words that have resonated down the centuries, and continue to inspire the imagination of our hearts, just as God inspired Mary, the Mother of God, chosen to become the mother of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

There is a puzzling ambivalence, though, isn't there? In that word 'magnify'. The Latin would tell us that it means 'make greater'. But how, when you think about it, can we magnify the Lord? What did Mary mean when she said 'my soul magnifies the Lord'? How can we make the Lord greater?

Because, in one sense, of course, we can't. The Lord God is greater than anything that we humans can conceive or think, or imagine. The Lord God is greater than anything – and indeed, because God is no thing, but being itself, God is greater than all there is, seen and unseen. So how can the soul of a simple, pure girl magnify all that God is? How can we magnify God, as we sing her words? There is nothing, after all, that can be added to God.

Yet to stop there is to miss something vital about God. It is to miss that God came to a humble girl and chose her to be the mother of the incarnation. It is to miss that God begins with a relationship – an ongoing relationship with the created order and humanity from the beginning of time. God is not above all that there is, with no connection, no interrelation. God's greatness is a greatness of love. A love that for ever empties itself into the world, into creation, into humanity, into that young woman Mary. A love in which we participate when we come to worship. And because of which, when we respond in love, we do indeed magnify the Lord.

God doesn't need us. We can't say this. But God's love is such that it requires a response.

Mary's response, all those centuries ago, was a 'yes' – a yes that came from the heart of all she was. It was utterly profound as it offered God all she had. Her spirit rejoiced in God her saviour. And yes, since then, all generations have called her blessed.

Mary shows us how to understand the nature of God's love, and how to respond. For God's love is not far distant, with a great gulf between God and creation, humanity, such that we have to earn our right to receive the blessings of God's grace. We don't have to win God's love; it is not

conditional upon our response. No. Rather God's love is there, around us, sustaining all that is, infused in everything. God's love is everywhere – fundamentally different to the things of the world. God's love is fundamental to all there is. It is a love in which we participate.

Mary's cry of the heart, that her soul magnifies the Lord, draws us to the truth that we don't always acknowledge - that God's active love is the element in which we love and move and have our being – just as the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, are at home in their element. So are we at home in the element of God's love.

To participate in God is our choice. We can turn away, and refuse to see how in God's love we are real; in it we come to full humanity. We can turn away, and diminish ourselves, shrinking away. That way lies death and oblivion, utter darkness and forgetfulness. We can choose that. Or we can face towards the light and brightness, the warmth of the fire of God's love, and live.

So Mary chose. She chose to recognise the love in which she participated, and say yes. And so, as she magnified the Lord, as she sung of God's overwhelming greatness, so her soul grew in fullness.

The fullness in which we participate – the fullness of God, the fullness of love – has a deep significance to how we understand our lives and purpose. For we participate in the fullness of God because, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Peter has it, in the fullness of time God sent his Son. Already in Jesus the fullness of all that is God is come to be; the fullness of God's love is already realised. It is a fullness that is beyond our comprehension; it is a fullness of love that passes our understanding.

We see it, though, all around us. In acts of kindness, and generosity. In self-giving, self-sacrifice and forgiveness that Jesus teaches us. In moments and glimpses of glory – listening to music, or observing with minute attention some natural phenomenon, or hearing the voice of a loved one, or rejoicing at something lost, now found. That deep sense of peace that can come upon us in extreme anxiety, or grief. Such moments remind us of another realm, a realm of God's glory and love that is there, constantly, and eternally. There for our restless hearts whenever we stop, with eyes to see, ears to hear. Then we know a reality that is all pervading and which is our true and real home. Where we belong now, and for all eternity. The love of God which is fullness itself, a fullness in which we participate, and which makes us whole. In which we are magnified.

So let us sing with Mary, allowing our souls to magnify the Lord. For then we are magnified with her by God's love, and grow into the fullness of God, in which is our true belonging, in which we are what God calls us to be.