

Readings and Sermon Blessed Virgin Mary

Collect

Almighty God,
who looked upon the lowliness of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and chose her to be the mother of your only Son:
grant that we who are redeemed by his blood
may share with her in the glory of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 61:10-end

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Galatians 4.4-7

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our^[a] hearts, crying, "Abba!^[b] Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.^[c]

Luke 1.46-55

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶ And Mary^[a] said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Sermon Mike Turner

Have you noticed how relatively quiet this week has been? That is in media terms rather than in the general sense of normal everyday noise.

After all the excitement and celebrations that have gripped our nation, and others too I'm sure, during the days of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, its almost as if the competing nations have taken time to pause and draw a much-needed deep breath.

Perhaps you were like me and many others, in thinking that the decision to go ahead with last year's postponed Olympic Games this year - with the need for limited travel, the extra burden of testing and the increased risk of infection that have accompanied the Covid-19 pandemic - was totally wrong and indeed extremely dangerous. It seemed to me that it was the wrong place and the wrong time to be putting thousands of people at further risk of infection. Well so far infection as a result of the games going ahead does not seem to have increased, although the general figures for infection in Japan have worsened. So my fears, and those of many others, appear to be unrealised, thank heaven.

And I'm sure that millions of people around the world have been enthralled watching the world's top exponents of so many sports in action. The lack of crowds has certainly made a difference, particularly for the competitors, but I found it easier to concentrate on the events without the background noise, and it has provided an opportunity to gain a better insight into the demands made upon teams and individuals competing at this level.

Although many of them appear superhuman, the mental and physical pressures they face - and the effects - have become more evident - and our prayers go out to all of them.

The commentators have also produced some interesting snippets of information - such as riders humming certain tunes to their horses to calm them, while other competitors listen to special music, poetry etc before their events. And yet that's nothing new; I know I do that when I am trying to concentrate - do you?

The tune we hum or listen to is no doubt personal to us and probably matches our circumstances.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the day when we remember her importance in the Christian story. Perhaps we might give some thought to the mental and physical pressures that she experienced during her life, especially after the angel Gabriel's first visit that we read about each Advent. I am sure that there were times when the pressures she felt upon her were almost too much for her to bear, rather like some of the

Olympic athletes. How did she cope as a young unmarried mother to be in a somewhat restrictive society? How did she cope when she and Joseph had to flee the country just after Jesus' birth; or when they lost their son for three days at the age of twelve; or when Jesus began his ministry and when he is nailed to a cross? I don't know the answers, but I would suggest it included much prayer, and probably listening to and singing some of the psalms which she knew so well.

But there were times when she wanted to shout and sing for joy - in some ways like the winning Olympic competitors scream and shout when they achieve that ultimate goal - a place on the medal podium.

In our gospel reading this morning we heard of one such day, when on a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, Mary's greeting causes the baby in Elisabeth's womb to leap for joy; and in response to Elisabeth's excited reply Mary gives voice to a song that celebrates what God has done for her and her people a song that echoes the words of Hannah in 1 Samuel. The song is of course what we know as Magnificat.

It is, as one bible commentator put it, the gospel before the gospel - a shout of triumph thirty weeks before Bethlehem; thirty years before Calvary and Easter.

As we know Mary's future didn't contain only happiness and songs of joy, she would face further times of sadness and sometimes deep despair - yet each time she would rise above them.

Hopefully the competitors who experienced the sapping mental and physical pressures that prevented them from achieving their full potential will conquer their adversaries and be able to celebrate their victories with shouts of joy too.

Most of us may never experience competition at Olympic level, we may not achieve the significance of Mary; yet we are equally important to our heavenly Father. And he knows that we will experience the highs and lows of life just as they did.

So with the promise of his love it is important to stay in contact with him through worship and prayer - in both the good times and the not so good times. And while our joyful songs of praise may not be as grand or as melodic as Mary's song, be assured that they will be just as valued.