

And Mary went with haste...

These lines, quoted by Pope Francis from Saint Ambrose's commentary on the Gospel of Luke, were the theme of the recent World Youth Day held in Lisbon, August 1-6. The sentence captures the attitude of Mary in the aftermath of the Annunciation. After the beautiful exchange with the Angel, Mary is left with a feeling of joy for her cousin Elizabeth who was considered barren, but was now with child. Her joy stems from the possibility of her being of help, but it also stems from the message the angel gave her. What message could Pope Francis have in mind for the youth and, in fact, for the whole Church, by quoting this beautiful phrase?

Life for so many of us is full of haste, running from pillar to post to make ends meet. Haste is, in a sense, a negative term. Haste makes us lose a sense of being in control, and we often make mistakes when we are in a haste. Then why is the haste that Mary shows a good thing?

- a. Mary our Mother is the icon for the Church. We are to emulate Mary in her journey of Faith – a faith that is not static, but ever moving, because it's a faith directed towards loving and serving others. Mary is in haste because she was moved by the thought that Elizabeth would need her, as she was advanced in age and could do with a close family member to help her. The haste was created out of a sense of joyful running towards the other to share and serve; there is a baby on the way.
- b. Mary's haste is not narcissistic. She is not concerned with her own state and the prophecies made to her. She is in haste to meet the miracle of an older cousin who has borne the weight of being called barren - the shame of not bearing children. Mary's haste is enhanced by the recognition of a miracle at work in the life of Elizabeth. Her own pregnancy is nothing short of a miracle, but the shocking miracle of Elizabeth's baby trains her poor confused heart to receive in a worthy manner the beauty of God's work in her life. Mary begins to understand the birth of Jesus through her service to Elizabeth.
- c. Mary's haste is directed outwards to the other, but more importantly, it is directed upwards, the Pope says. What does that signify? Mary's haste is marked by a sense of spiritual movement; she is able to see the finger of God at work in the small details of her life. She makes sense of the message given to her by the angel, and is filled with a spiritual haste. She wants to see the will of God become a reality. The word becomes flesh in her womb and also in her hastening towards Elizabeth. Mary's haste makes God present through its concern, its outreach, its going beyond self, and above all, through its trusting in the invisible plan of God.

There are so many lessons to be drawn from the haste of Mary for us as domestic (family) and local Church (parish and archdiocese).

1. We learn from Mary that haste disturbs us and robs us of peace; it takes us away from the source of life. Haste makes sense only when it is directed towards serving the other, towards showing love and concern to the other, towards building a more just society, and towards making sure no one is left in want.
2. We begin to see how our normal haste is always about ourselves and our small world, often making us inward-looking, me, myself and I. We hasten for all the wrong reasons,

we are afraid of being judged, laughed at, made fun of, considered poor, considered useless, and above all, considered inadequate. Mary's haste shows us that when the focus is outside of us, we have no time to look at our selfish needs. In being there for others and fulfilling their needs, our own priorities change, our burdens become lighter, and our lives change. The world becomes loving, one person at a time. Every person who decides to live for others changes the world; one act of kindness makes a big difference.

3. In the light of the hasty life we live, our spirituality is a big question mark. What is of a greater value? A life lived in love and abundance of meaningful relationships, or a life lived in search of temporary fleeting comforts that are found in a worldly life? Are we training ourselves and our children to live in complacency in the false hopes provided by this world? Or are we directing them to arise and go in haste towards the kingdom of love and eternal peace, where there is no pain, no sorrow, no striving to outdo the other? Mary went in haste because she was filled with hope for a different world which was to be made possible by her son, the harbinger of Divine life.

In the light of the stark polarisation of our times in the place we call home, the Church calls us to hasten along the path of mutual love and a transforming love which this nation needs. We are not to be alarmed by the spectre of violence and disturbance. The truth is, our brothers and sisters are loving, caring human beings; all that is needed is for us to arise and work towards building closer bonds. We are called to arise and work against hatred, to strive for a cessation of violence and strife, and usher in a community of love and justice.

And Mary arose and moved with haste... carrying with her a legion of sons and daughters committed to the coming of the kingdom.

Questions for reflection:

1. What new insights have I received from the paper?
2. How can I choose to hasten spiritually?