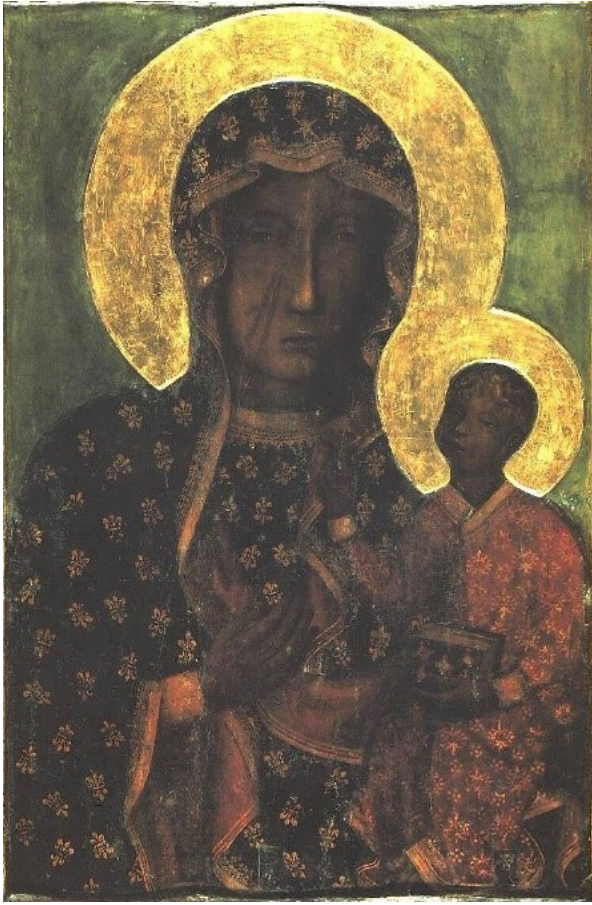


Thought For The Day Advent 21st December
Levelling Up Not Down



The Black Madonna of Częstochowa, Poland

Luke 1.46-56

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked with favour 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 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.”

56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Thought: Levelling Up Not Down

“Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed”

In today’s passage Mary magnifies the Lord, by proclaiming God’s greatness and rejoicing in His favour in choosing her to be the mother of our Lord, the Mighty One has indeed “done great things for” her. Surely, she must be blessed. And yet, Mary’s decision to say yes to God will have drastic consequences for her life. Perhaps Mary reflected on that encounter as she stood at the foot of the cross and the pain she had felt in her life, and thought to herself. Is this what it means to be blessed?

The blessedness that Mary celebrates stands in stark contrast to our cultural norms. By our standards she does not look at all blessed. God has chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah, but in practical terms what does that mean for her? She is not from a family that can afford the better things in life. She a peasant girl from a small village. Her friends and neighbours see her as a disgrace because she is unmarried and pregnant. Furthermore, as she will soon learn from Simeon if she hasn’t perceived it already, being the mother of the

Messiah will certainly be a mixed blessing. And yet despite all this, Mary praises God for the honour he has bestowed on her, for the Mighty One's agenda differs radically from the plans of human rulers. Mary praises God for overturning society's structures by bringing down the powerful and lifting up the powerless.

She sings about the God who saves not just souls, but humanity. The God she celebrates is not content merely to point people toward heaven; God's redemptive work begins here on earth. God fills the hungry not only with food, but with hope. Rather than being satisfied with comforting the lowly, Mary's Lord lifts them up, granting them dignity and honour, a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation. At the same time, God shows strength by disrupting the world's power structures, dethroning rulers, and humbling the mighty.

Clearly such saving acts are Good News for the poor and lowly, but what does Mary's song mean for the wealthy and the powerful? Is there nothing but judgment for them? Though judgment and salvation may seem like opposites, they can go hand in hand. Those who stand in awe only of themselves and their own power will be judged. Yet if the wealthy and powerful can only see it, by bringing them down - by emptying and humbling them - God is saving them. When they turn their gaze from themselves and their own accomplishments, when their awe is directed to God - then there is mercy for them, too.

When God empties the rich of their excess and fills the hungry with good things, the result is not social reversal - with the powerless and the powerful changing places - as much as it is social levelling. The rich and powerful are stripped of their arrogance and taught to love their neighbours as they love themselves. Thus God provides for the poor and honours the humiliated. When the arrogant are scattered and the powerful brought down, then every person has access to enough of the world's resources, and no one has too much. Every person is treated with dignity and respect, and no one uses power to harm.

God's saving judgment is for all of us, he alone can dispel our distorted worldview, he alone can turn lives around. The mother of the Messiah has experienced God's blessing. Her blessing, like ours, is a cross-shaped blessing, "a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)" as T. S. Eliot expressed it, for it's the priceless gift of God's salvation.

Advent blessings, Linda

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