

As you know, I was interviewed recently for New York Catholic Radio, and I was surprised- pleasantly surprised- that the interviewer spent a good amount of time talking to me about my spiritual journey. And of course I spoke on my “23rd Street experience”, in which I had an encounter with God on 23rd St. between 5th and 6th Avenues in the city, experiencing Him in all that was around me and seeing all things in Him and being aware of how we all are connected with one another. But you know that story- you’ve heard that a million times from me already.

The interviewer asked me “*Was there someone that you talked to about this experience?*” and the honest answer was “no”. None of my family and none of my friends- as few as they were- and hardly any of my co-workers were religious and no one would understand what had happened to me. Not that I was anything special by having that experience- every person can and many people have- but I did not have the joy of sharing what happened to me and having someone to make sense of it all with me.

The story of the Visitation that we just heard in today’s Gospel is too easily and too often reduced to a story of hospitality and being nice to one another. Or it becomes just an apologetic statement of Jesus’ divinity- John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, even in the womb, and Elizabeth calls Mary the mother of her Lord. Which are not bad things, of course not, but let’s talk about this from a different perspective.

When Mary had that visit from the Archangel Gabriel telling her that she would be the Mother of the Most High, who do you think she talked to about that right after it happened? I would guess not her parents, even though they were holy, since this is not something you tell your mother and father about. And not Joseph, the man she was betrothed to, since he would have assumed the worst, and we know from St. Matthew’s version of the Christmas story that he was going to divorce her quietly until he was told to do otherwise by an angel in a dream.

Mary instead went to her relative Elizabeth- yes, much older than she was but another woman who experienced something that turned her life upside down, and in some strange way was instrumental in the salvation of a people who had longed for this salvation for countless years and who needed this deliverance more than ever. Both having a new life within them that was entrusted to them and found life through them.

Meaning that they both could define what happened to them in terms of faith and what it meant for them to have such a unique role in what God was doing for the world and for His people. Not really understanding it, and maybe not even wanting to because who knew what this would all entail, but just enjoying this moment of God's presence and God's saving action right in front of them.

We all know the feeling of having something happen to us, or something going on inside us, that is so wonderful and so joyful that we can't wait until we tell someone else about it- until we share it with someone. Because we know, even in an obscure and hidden way, that God has touched us and we want so much for everyone else to know that experience, because there's nothing else like it.

Granted, I know very well that not everyone has a family member or a friend that is a person of faith and it is sometimes difficult to find someone in your life to share your experience of faith with. But of course you have your parish family- your brothers and your sisters in this parish community that are so different among each other in so many ways but who all share this desire to know and love and serve the Lord, and also to be there for one another to help one another in so many ways, including in growing and strengthening our lives of faith. The Eucharist we celebrate together is plenty of evidence of that.

So take advantage of the opportunities we offer all the time of groups and workshops and presentations that include conversation about faith right alongside learning about matters of faith. Or consider going to spiritual direction, and we have several spiritual directors in our parish and you'll be hearing soon about that. Or strike up a conversation with one of your fellow parishioners who you may not even know the name of, and you'd be surprised how much they would want to talk about faith as well.

Not that you have to do any of those things- I'm the last one to tell anybody what to do- just know that these opportunities are out there and, believe me, for someone who is painfully shy and would rather not talk, is a privilege and a joy.

As I said, what God is doing for us and within us is too good to keep to oneself. Share it with someone, for their sake and for yours.