

When people fall in love the second time they're more cautious than they are the first. We're wiser the second time. We know that love brings pain as well as joy. When we've seen what love can do, it's harder to love again.

There's an unusual love story behind today's Gospel. You're familiar with this scene, especially if you pray the rosary. The Visitation is one of the 15 mysteries, and the prayer, "Hail, Mary," retells part of the story.

The Visitation is the meeting of two women with the most spectacular pregnancies in the history of the world. One of them was old, and although she had tried many times to bear a child, she could never had one. The other was young and was still a virgin. Two impossible candidates for pregnancy, and here they are.

Elizabeth especially seems overcome by the event. Mary travels across Judea to visit her, and the sound of Mary's voice stirs Elizabeth so deeply that the baby in her womb jumps. No one has ever loved the old woman so deeply as God was loving her now.

Did her husband Zechariah love her? Certainly, but at this moment Zechariah had a problem; he was mute. When the angel Gabriel had told him to expect a child, he doubted, so the angel took away his voice till John the Baptist was born. Women who complain that it's hard to get their husbands to communicate will sympathize with Elizabeth, whose husband literally became mute at the turning point of their marriage. Others may envy a woman whose husband just shut up for nine months.

In any event, God was loving Elizabeth now. And the love seems to disturb her. She can't talk about it, so she talks about Mary. She says Mary is blessed and the fruit of her womb is blessed. She says Mary did not doubt the Lord's words and that Elizabeth herself was unworthy to have her visit. The love that's happening to Elizabeth seems so wonderful that she's afraid to believe it's true. It's as if she has known love. She knows it brings pain as well as joy, and it's hard for her to love again.

These two women let love enter their lives, and they were forever changed.

My brothers and sisters, on Christmas, God will send his love to us. If we have known love, we know it brings pain as well as joy. It will be hard to love again. It will be hard to take a walk some morning, alone with our thoughts. It will be hard to converse with a friend some evening, telling how we feel. It will be hard to come to church and confess our sins. It will be hard to give the greatest gift, to give our own love. It will be hard to get close to someone, to get close to God. But if we let love enter our lives, we will be forever changed.