

25. March 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 32: “The Yes of our Lady”

Lk 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

A crucial moment in the history of humanity: the angel of the Lord, addressing the Virgin Mary, announces the divine plan of salvation. She is God's chosen one to receive in her womb the Messiah.

We cannot know what God's criteria are for choosing His own, entrusting them with special missions. The Bible does not give us much information about Mary's life prior to the angel's visit. All we have are various traditions or what are described as 'private revelations'.

From the biblical text we can deduce that she had a deep union with God, and that her life was pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, for the angel says to her: “*You have won God's*

favour". Also the way she reacted to the angel's announcement shows that she led a life of deep faith and virtue.

How great the announcement she receives! All Israel was waiting for the Messiah, and Scripture provided some clues that allowed us to calculate approximately when He was to come. But, as is often the case with prophecies, they are not fully understood until they have been fulfilled.

The message that Mary receives is so overwhelming that certainly at that time she could not yet understand it in all its greatness, especially the announcement that she would conceive a child: "*But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?*" Let us stop here for a moment and try to understand the character of this question that Mary addresses to the angel, for it will be very important to adapt it in our own spiritual life.

Let us recall the passage in which the angel announces to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth, an elderly woman, would still conceive a child (cf. Lk 1:5-25). Zechariah could not hide his doubt and, because he did not believe the angel, he remained mute for a while. Obviously, Mary's attitude in her question to the angel is not the same as that of Zechariah, since the angel gives her an answer and does not reproach her. It seems that Our Lady's question concerned the way God was going to work. In other words, she did not doubt; she trusted.

Sacred Scripture has been given to us as a guide for our life. So we can learn from the Virgin Mary how to deal in God's Spirit with situations that are beyond us. Zechariah's reaction shows us that his understanding, based on human experience, was not willing to recognize the extraordinary nature of what was being announced to him. In such a situation, attentive listening is required, as well as a great deal of confidence and also the ability to be silent. God's message must first penetrate our being with His light. Since we are dealing with a supernatural light, normally we will not be able to grasp it at first with our reason. First the understanding has to be illuminated, and this does not usually happen right away.

Another part of the Gospel describes that Mary "*kept all things in her heart*" (Lk 2:51).

Obviously, Our Lady had her heart prepared for the divine announcement, for her question was an open one: How are you going to do it? We can assume that that is what

her question was aimed at. In fact, her whole attitude was one of openness, as her final answer to the angel shows us: “*You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.*” She does not start an argument with the angel, but is willing to listen and to serve, and gives herself to the Will of God.

This is the attitude that we must learn in the face of the things of God. His plans surpass us and we cannot discover them with our reason, unless He Himself grants us. This does not mean that we should no longer make use of our reason; rather, that we should humbly submit it to God. Understanding is a natural light and therefore has limitations. God's revelation, on the other hand, is a supernatural light, which goes far beyond reason.

Therefore, the correct attitude towards the things of God is faith together with trust. Of course we have to evaluate whether what we are facing is really from God. But once we are certain that it is so, it is fitting that, through prayer, we set aside all the obstacles that come from our understanding and our feelings. Our will must then be completely directed to God and be receptive to what He wants to tell us.

This is how Our Lady found herself before God, and thanks to her response, God was able to fulfil what He had prepared for mankind. Mary said a 'yes' in full freedom, on behalf of all of us, so that the Redeemer may come into the world. In this way, she collaborated with God's saving plan, and with our yes, we are called, just like Mary, to collaborate with the divine plan!