

THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY “YES”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

In view of tomorrow's Solemnity, Jesus' presence in the tabernacle takes on a very special meaning. And St. John Paul, in the twilight of his pontificate, put together five more decades of the rosary call the Luminous Mysteries and included the Institution of the Holy Eucharist as a mystery of the rosary. And at face value that may seem a bit counterintuitive, especially if Our Lady traditionally was not even at the Last Supper - only his Apostles were present there. But nevertheless, this is a mystery of the rosary. Now, why is it a mystery of the rosary? Because everything we have in our Catholic faith, all the sacraments - the most important being the true presence of Jesus, the Holy Eucharist - is traced back to a specific episode.

It all originates in a teenage young lady, perhaps fourteen, fifteen years of age. When Mary gave her answer to the Archangel Gabriel - *Gabriel*, Hebrew word, which means *the strength of God* - when she gave her affirmative answer, the world never remained the same. It was the most revolutionary *yes* - earth-changing, earth-shattering. That *yes* has a very personal effect on ourselves. That *yes* made it possible for us to have the greatest gift God could have given us and that is himself packaged in human form. So, we ask you, Lord, to help us bring this Solemnity, this theme of the Solemnity of the Annunciation to our meditation and may it, Lord, shed light so that we respond to our own vocation.

I baptized a little baby a few days ago and I said that today we are celebrating - whatever the little baby's name - her vocation. And not only her entrance into the Catholic Church, she's going to cease to be a little infant pagan and she's going to become a little infant Catholic even though she's literally kicking and screaming. It seems like she's not with the program, just that the water's cold, it was cold last week. And usually, if the priest has the presence of mind and wants to walk the extra mile, he heats up the water so the baptism doesn't cause so much discomfort to the little baby, but I haven't gotten that far yet, okay... all for it, but too many- too many things to think about, too many variables between the oil- different kinds of oils, and the candle, and the bib, and the vestments, and the book. So, back to this, and I said, we're celebrating vocation and I noticed that everybody looked perplexed, you know, this is her baptism, this is not her vocation. And I could just read the glazed eyes with, where is he going with this?

Well, in our baptism, all of us, to put it metaphorically, received a seedling life of Jesus. We are reborn in Jesus' life, seedling. And that seed of the life of Jesus is not meant to stay a seed. The vocation of a string

bean is not to remain just a bean or a seed... doesn't it make sense. Hey, listen, come to my den, I have a display case of radish seeds and tomato seeds and string bean seeds and eggplant seeds. Would you like to see the seeds? And you probably- politely... yeah, yeah, sure, fine. What you really want to see is the full-grown tomato giving off tomatoes and the- and the string beans giving off string beans, you know, it's not very interesting just to stare at seeds. And if you ask me the question, well, what are you going to do with seeds? Well, I'm going to keep them in the display case here so people could look at the seeds. And probably you would say, well, I don't think that the purpose of a seed, to put it in a display case. You should plant it and get a plant out of it, get some food out. And by the same token, the life of Christ that we receive in baptism is meant to grow so much that we virtually pass for Christ himself on the order of love and mercy and joy, so that we can say with St. Paul, 'it is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me.' So, by virtue of receiving this life of Christ, we're called to let that life develop.

Let's go back to the Blessed Mother. Her vocation is the template of every vocation and we do see a common thread running through all the callings in the Gospels - different characters - whether it's Mary who's immaculately conceived or Matthew who needs two or three good confessions, there is a common thread running through all vocations. And Mary's Annunciation is sort of a help menu of what it takes to bring Jesus Christ into the world. What does that mean? When we talk about *world* we talk about the people who populate the world. We don't just mean that we get to put Jesus on the park bench, you know, or we're going to put Jesus on- in the bus stop or we're going to put Jesus in the empty chair, or we're going to put Jesus on the baseball diamond. No, when we say bring Jesus into the world, we mean real individuals that populate the world. And, we see with the Blessed Mother that there is an intimate relationship between my response, the kind of response I give, and the intensity through which Jesus is present in the world. The more- the better my response, the more he becomes present through me.

But let's read a little bit of tomorrow's Gospel. We reconstruct the see- the scene, the first Joyful Mystery, and we are in a little, tiny town called Nazareth. And unbeknownst to her because of her humility, she was very well aware - every woman was aware - that she may be the go-to person, a little bit like a mom when she gives birth to a little boy - especially now that the papacy is not limited to Italians, maybe that little guy will be a future pope, or something to that effect. And I think probably back to those chosen- the Old Testament times, a woman would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah - it was predicted in the Book of Isaiah. And Mary, lost in prayer, tradition has it, she's just a kid, you know, at least from my perspective, fourteen years of age, and she plays the part, she's the greatest saint who ever lived, her charity is off the charts. But it's, again, it's packaged in the ordinary - she's helping around the house and washing things and cleaning clothes and making clothes and visiting the sick and hanging around with her friends. But the love, even though it's manifested in such an ordinary way, such a folksy way, it's as good as it gets. And she is already, before the angel Gabriel visits her like Joseph, she has already personally committed herself to be centered on God and she has committed herself to celibacy, and she knows her future husband, Joseph, will be committed to celibacy as well.

And you're going to say well, why did she want to marry if she was that committed? Because you had to in those days, alright, she had no choice, that was the custom of the time and in those days the parents told the kids what to do. It wasn't like today that it's the other way around. So, and Joseph, the same thing. So, tradition has it that they had that agreement and they knew that. And so she's - I was gonna say in her den... I don't know if they had dens in those days - but she's visited by a very mysterious person who is supra-human. Okay, I don't care how holy you are, you get visited by an archangel when you don't expect it, you're going to be a little bit startled. Okay, I don't know if he had wings, but he was an archangel. They have, you know, a higher being than we do. So, this mysterious individual pays her a visit. No, the doorbell didn't ring, there's no knock on the door. All of a sudden, he's there. She's reading her, you know, her Bible. She's reading the Book of Proverbs, and all of a sudden this creature- this person, you know, who's just not like the ordinary mortal, comes in and starts to talk to her. And yes, she's kind of shaken up, and what happens?

The- he says, 'And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary.'" So, we know she was a little afraid. Well, you would be, too - I would be, I'd be really spooked if an angel visited me. I believe in them, but I don't want to be visited by- by one, you know. I know he's around and I know he's helping, that's plenty. 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name, Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord will give to him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.' So, the angel gives her the big picture, that this kingdom is going to be victorious just like David was the greatest king and conquered that part of the world, your son is going to go much further than David. He's the new David and his kingdom is going to be victorious.

Now, what's interesting to note that this possibility hinges on this teenage girl giving her yes. God is not going to force her yes, she's got to decide, she's got to make that decision because love is free, and love is making a choice. You- coercion and love are incompatible. That's why we need our- our freedom is very important because to love we need to be free. And God may be calling us, but it's important that we answer him freely. So, she gets the message and Mary says, well, I don't know how this is going to happen, you know, I'm going to conceive a child and he's going to be the new David, his kingdom will have no end, he's- he's the Savior of the world. Okay, this is the Messiah. The angel is informing her, guess what? We want you to be the mother of this Messiah that was predicted a thousand years ago. You're it. You're the girl, you're the- you're the go-to mom here. And she's a little bit confused. Well, I just told God I'm going to be celibate and so is my husband, you know, what do we do? And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be since I have no husband.' And the angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be the son of God.'

All right, you don't need a husband. I don't? No, not in this case. The Holy Spirit will conceive the Son of God and you're going to bring the Son of God into the world. Will you do it? Now, that's a very loaded question. And I don't know how long this conversation took, you know. Usually the Gospel is very frugal about quotations and information. As St. John the Evangelist says, you know, if- if everything was recorded, the whole world wouldn't be able to contain everything written about him. So, I'm morally certain that this

was not, you know, a five-second conversation because, and you could see in her Magnificat, this is very significant, that she knew the Old Testament. The Magnificat is taken from all over the Old Testament, and so she knew that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. In fact, there's more information on Jesus' suffering in the Book of Isaiah than in the Gospels. There's more information, in a certain sense, in the Psalms than in the Gospels. They- they will all come inside.

And so, Mary knew what she was getting in to, and her response will be very similar to the words Jesus will use in Gethsemane. So she- so to say *yes* wasn't my gosh, I'm going to be famous, here, I'm going to be the mother of the Messiah, I get a castle, I get servants, it's gonna be fancy dining from now on, I'm not going to have to balance containers of oil on my head anymore, I'm going to move to Jerusalem, that's going to be my new home and I'm going to announce it and there's gonna be a housewarming party because I'm going to be the mother of the Messiah, I'm going to be the most famous woman in the Roman Empire. It wasn't that way. She would give birth to a Suffering Servant, that she was well aware of through her knowledge of the Old Testament. And how does she respond? It's- it's the blueprint of what my response needs to be. And the Latin word, which is- it's *fiat*, means *let it be done unto me*.

'And behold, your kinswoman, Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son.' There's a lot of conceiving around that time. 'And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren, for with God, nothing is- is impossible. And Mary said, okay- 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord,' which means, Lord, I'm at your service, I'm here to do whatever you want me to do. Okay, now I got it, Holy Spirit, I'll do it. Yes, I will cooperate with God in bringing the Son of God into the world. And she has that very special mission because she, with the help of the Holy Spirit, with the overshadow of the Holy Spirit, she has brought God into our world, she has given God his humanity. She- she has given God a human face. I have God close to me, because that what Jesus' name is, *God with us, Emmanuel*, because of her *yes*. I owe her a lot because of her *yes*. The whole redemption, the whole salvation of the world hung on a teenage girl's *yes*.

Now, Lord, how do I make this practical? One thing is, you know, we're- we look at Mary of Nazareth and she is the perfect creation of God without any sign of temptation, no tinge of selfishness. Her cheerfulness, perfect charity, perfect mercy, perfect, you know, I don't know, even- even if our pride was off the charts, it's kind of hard to identify with this, you know, where this- this girl never experienced an iota of selfishness even though she was free to say *yes* to giving birth to the Suffering Servant. And I may say, well, that's- that's the Blessed Virgin Mary, what are you telling me, Lord? Our Lord is saying that I want you to do the same thing. I want you to bring the Son of God into the world. I want you to be a conduit for the Son of God to be received by others, by those you know, by your family, by your friends. I want you to make Jesus Christ more present than he is already. I want his presence to be felt in the people you know.

And we may say well, how do I do that? Does it depend on what I say to them? Does it depend on being on top of my game and knowing the doctrine of the Catholic Church? Does it mean that I need to moralize a little bit more in the classroom or kind of sober up these parties and, you know, talk spiritual or talk moral? What does that mean? Am I sort of the spiritual wet blanket of my circle of friends? When I see, hear,

something a little bit off color do I need to turn redder than I usually do or laugh less at something that is not appropriate? What does this mean?

Well, let's look a little bit at great evangelizers. Let's- let's look at some people say - we're all a work in progress, but some people say, more men than women, *I'm another St. Augustine*, you know. Well, as I usually say, let's wait until you're dead and then we could do that. But right now, you know, let's not- let's not get ahead of the game, here. And yes, he was- he was your typical pagan of ancient Rome. He was as good of a pagan in the negative sense of the word as any other person who didn't have anything to do with God - party animals, sensual. His philosophy was a- kind of contradicted natural law. Kind of a huge ego - he was a genius, so, and he knew it - won prizes for his literature before he converted.

And he had to say *fiat*. He- his spiritual appetite was wet not because, well I just read this, I read a section of Plato's *Republic*, and I really want to convert - didn't happen. He's started- he- he- he was familiar with Scripture but didn't get anything out of it. And then he tried it again and he's starting to see that, you know, it was very edifying. But he did not contemplate conversion until he saw St. Ambrose - he was the pastor of the cathedral in Milan and his poor mom was probably re- respected his freedom, but she didn't overdo it, and for 20+ years she was hounding the guy - just tried to baptize him when he was sixteen, didn't want to do that - didn't want to break up with his live-in girlfriend either, etc. And he sees Ambrose and that's what gets him, that's what moves him. In spite of all the books he's read, all the platonic philosophy read, he sees Ambrose and he's touched by Ambrose. He's touched by Ambrose's witness of charity. And his- his mother introduced him to Ambrose. She would go to church in that cathedral. And Augustine had to make a big decision. He started to convert, he started to pray for, you know, I'm sorry, Augustine said in spiritual direction, said Auggie, you got to pray for purity. I mean, we got- we got to get this thing straightened out, you know, and so he said, well- well, I don't know if I, you know, I don't think I could do it. He says, well you pray, pray for help, pray for strength. The Lord won't deny you strength. So he does, and he says, 'Lord, give me purity, but not yet.' And finally, he- he gives it all and no- not only is he baptized by Ambrose, but he decides then and there, I'm going to give my entire life to God. He became a monk, and God kept asking more of him, you know. And I'll leave the monastery, become a priest and then became a bishop.

But- he reached a point where had had to give it all. And yes, then he became an evangelizer, wasn't- wasn't just because he was a brilliant thinker - many brilliant thinkers - they all follow the very same pattern. And I'm sure, especially in the Gospel, both men and women, because Our Lord is always asking the same thing, will you- can you follow me? Follow me. And maybe Our Lord got push back- he got push back from Peter. He got push back from a lot of people because they felt sinful. I'm not up for this. And the Lord said, well, you got to just do one thing and you'll be an evangelizer. You need to make a decision, and I'm not talking about specific vocations. That's too personal. Each person has their own personal way to follow Christ. But I'm talking about our- our own collective vocation which is to be completely centered on Our Lord. It's not observance. it's not just mere practice. It's making Christ the center of my life. And in today's Gospel we read 'One of the scribes came up and heard him disputing with one another and seeing that he answered them, well, he asked him, which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, the first is, hear, O Israel,

the Lord Our God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Without doing that, we learn from Our Lady, she's the template, she's the standard, there's not much evangelization because evangelization is an overflow of giving your colossal yes.

So, last Sunday, long gospel - Lent is the season for long gospels, especially Cycle A, alright. We're in Cycle A right now, so hold on to your liturgical seatbelts because you'll have long gospels between now and Easter. And we had the Samaritan woman, and she- her conversion story is the longest conversion story in the New Testament and she empties out a town - seems like Our Lord microwaved her conversion. I mean for, you know, being, you know, the female version of Augustine to, you know, Our Lord's greatest witness and there's a little sign there. I know, I know, we're done. There's a little sign there that she left her water jar. And I'm morally certain that when Our Lord- Our Lord said, listen, I want you to be an evangelizer. I want you to bring this to other people and I want you to start with your town. And she probably said, me? I have a bad reputation, you know, I'm a little bit of a scandal, right? I've got the record for marriages in my town. She married five times, it's a lot. And after that, I'm not even bothering with marriage anymore, you know, who needs it? If you center yourself around me and leave all things, you'll empty- you'll bring the town to me because I'm going to change you, I'm going to give you this gift. But to get this gift, you need to say yes. So she says yes. And the townspeople say we- we've come to you because of the witness. That's the exact words, the witness of the woman. She gave a witness, she didn't win an argument, she didn't win a debate - something about this woman. She was- she became Christ and the medium to- to become Christ is to give him a yes.

Now lastly, last point, how do I give him a yes. Well, first it's a desire. Yeah, I want you to be the center. Then we need to take small steps, I want to run the marathon. I want to be- I want to compete in tennis. Well, desire is important. You gotta want that first, but you're not going to do that in a day. I want to learn Greek and I only know English. All right, well, you're gonna have to want that and then you have to put in the time, you know, you have to work on your Greek every day. Yeah, I want to be a saint. Alright, you got to do mental prayer, got to start going to Mass, you need to say the rosary, you need to increase the level of your love for your family and your friends, you need to deny yourself in little, tiny steps. But the big picture has to be there, the yes has to be there.

And we could finish reading this from St. Josemaria under the title *Christian Vocation*: "The Christian vocation is one of sacrifice, penance, expiation. We must make reparation for our sins – for the many times we turned our face aside so as to avoid the gaze of God – and all the sins of mankind. We must try to imitate Christ, 'always carrying about in our body the dying of Christ,' his abnegation, his suffering on the Cross, 'so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.' Our way is one of immolation and, in this denial, we find joy with peace." And joy are two words that are synonymous with Jesus Christ.'

Mary, we ask for your prayer of intercession so that we could imitate your yes, and like you, bring Christ to the world as well.

I thank you my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help with putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. Amen.



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