

Homily on Luke 1:26-38

December 19, 2017

Intro: On the 4th Sunday of Advent we draw near to the advent of Jesus, his conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the great Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation, Mary is pictured as a beautiful blonde woman, dressed in the fashion of the day, evidently in a quiet place of prayer, with a Bible nearby. This is a long way from the historical Mary of Nazareth. She was an illiterate poor peasant girl with olive skin, dark hair, brown eyes, an aquiline nose, probably no more than 5' tall. In short, probably no more physically beautiful than the average one of us. Her contact with God was not in long hours of prayer but in the daily grind of a peasant woman in a tiny home. What made her beautiful was her absolute 100% commitment to the will of her loving God---exactly what makes us beautiful! With that in mind, let's look at Luke's story of the annunciation.

Luke: Gabriel breaks into her routine with a startling address, "Hail, full of grace," which puzzles Mary's humility. He brings her the good news of pregnancy, the goal of any Jewish woman, but it carries with it a host of titles: he will be Son of the Most High, he will be seated on David's royal throne, he will have an eternal reign over the house of Jacob. All of these are titles for the long-awaited messiah. How can this poor girl from a backwater village be mother of such a powerful king? And why now, before she is inseminated by her future husband? Mary is overwhelmed! But Gabriel assures her that this will not be an ordinary conception: it will come about through the power of the Holy Spirit, and so the messianic title, "Son of God," will have a mysterious divine connotation. Now Mary must have been truly overwhelmed, but her habitual commitment to God comes to her rescue, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." WOW!

The meaning for Mary: This fiat will be the meaning of all the upside-down events in Mary's life. When the time comes for her giving birth, it will not be with her mother and family and friends in her own home, but on the road, in a stranger's stable, and lucky to have that. When the child was an infant, they became refugees in Egypt, with no timeline for their return home. Even when they did return, the boy was a constant surprise, since he was preternaturally good. And yet at age 12, he abandoned them to be in his Father's house, the Temple. For all those years when he was a carpenter, she must have wondered, "How is this messiahship to occur? And when he finally left her on his messianic mission, she was left alone with her God. But at last he was on the way to his throne in Jerusalem! But even this way turns out wrong--his throne is a cross erected by the Romans. In every one of these events, and in all the moments and breaths in between, she clung to her fiat, her conviction that God's will would be done, even in the midst of every pain and uncertainty. That is not only her holiness, but her peace.

The Meaning for us Christians is the same as it was for Jesus Himself. Through the days of drudgery as a day laborer for over 15 years, in the incomprehension of his disciples, through the opposition of the Pharisees, to the agony in the garden in which he prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Our country is in a dark time; our Church is in a dark time. We all have our dark days, or even dark years. We find ourselves in position where there seem to be no good options. We want our life to be otherwise. But all the time our life is what we have made it and God is present there, not in some alternative universe that does not exist. Fr. Mike McHugh used to say on the Browning Native American reservation, "I have two purposes here: to meet the people where they are and to love them where they are."

We have to learn as Mary knew, "Thy will be done." Saying this in all circumstances aligns us with God's will, which is our peace.

Merry Christmas.