

“Mary’s Calling; Our Calling”

4th Sunday of Advent [B]

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

Yesterday while flying into both Orlando and Cleveland airports

- the skies were largely clear
- until the last 1,000 feet of our approach to the runways
 - where foggy conditions were worse than forecasted.
- 500, 400, 300, 200 feet
 - before finally seeing the approach lights
 - to continue in for a safe landing.
- It was a reminder of the faith we put in our technology and training.

Today we look at a deeper kind of faith – our faith in God.

In our first reading the prophet Nathan

- relayed to King David a message from God:
 - that He would raise up another great king
 - from his descendants.
 - God would *“be a father to him*
 - *and he... a son”* to the Father.
 - His kingdom and throne shall stand firm forever...
- I’ve always marveled at the faith of the Jewish people
 - for continuing to believe this prophecy...
 - Century upon century looking forward to the birth of Christ.

After about 1,000 years, this prophecy would indeed come to fruition,

- and today we are at the very eve of celebrating
 - the day when the Son of God, our king Jesus Christ, was born.

And it is on this 4th Sunday of Advent we read in today’s Gospel

- this beautiful exchange between the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary
- Where Gabriel reveals the rolling out of God’s plan of salvation...
- A plan first alluded to by God *all the way back* in Genesis ch 3...

- immediately after the fall of man...
- Where sin entered humanity thru Eve's disobedience
 - allowing the Serpent to wreak havoc on mankind,
- God would enter humanity thru Mary's obedience
 - ultimately crushing the head of the Serpent.

We read today of this dramatic meeting between the angel Gabriel

- and the "New Eve" -- the Virgin Mary.
- A passage that is rich in topics we could discuss...
 - Gabriel's very unique greeting: "*Hail, full of grace*"
 - and how it points to Mary's Immaculate Conception
 - How the Holy Spirit would "overshadow" Mary –
 - in the same way He had overshadowed His tabernacle
 - back in Exodus ch 40 (Ex 40:35)
 - The name of Jesus – meaning "YWH saves"
 - a name that contains both Christ's identity and mission

There is much we could delve into, but I'd like to focus today on Mary's faith

- on how Mary responded in her encounter with the angel Gabriel
 - How she responded to God's calling in her life, to her vocation

So often when we hear the word "Vocation"

- there's a tendency to immediately tune out:
 - "Well, I'm not called to be a priest or a nun
 - so this talk obviously isn't for me..."

Well maybe you're not called to be a priest or a nun

- but this message is still definitely for you...

For the reality is that each and every one of us -- without exception –

- much like Mary in today's Gospel, are called by God.
- Every single one of us has a Vocation in life (from the Latin: *vocare*, "to call")
 - God created you with a very specific purpose and mission

- and this is a call you should always be listening for.
- Some callings are quite unique
 - such as Mary's calling to be the mother of Jesus Christ
- Most are more or less common:
 - Holy Orders, Religious Life, Holy Matrimony, Consecrated Single Life

But Mary's response is worth meditating on

- for there is much we can learn from her example.
 - Much we can apply to our own lives.
- Mary's fiat is more than a beautiful story,
 - it is a roadmap for us as we ponder God's calling...

Back Jan 1979, St. Pope John Paul II gave a homily at the Mexico City Cathedral

- where he identified four dimensions of Mary's Faith:
 - Search, Acceptance, Constancy & Consistency
- I'd like to take a look at these with you today.

1. Search

When Mary heard Gabriel's announcement of her life's calling to bear the Son of God

- her gears immediately began to turn and she wondered aloud:
 - How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?
- Before addressing Mary's question, let us take a moment to look back earlier in this chapter...
- You may recall how, in the story immediately before this one in Luke ch 1, the angel Gabriel approached someone else about a miraculous birth...
 - Gabriel told the elderly Zechariah that he & his barren wife Elizabeth
 - were going to conceive a son.
 - They were called to be the parents of John the Baptist.

- Zechariah said to Gabriel: *“How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”* (Lk 1:18) For this expression of disbelief, Zechariah was made mute until after John was born.
- But doesn't Zechariah saying, *“How shall I know this? For I am an old man...”* sound a lot like
- Mary saying to Gabriel, *“How can this be since I have no relations with a man?”* (Lk 1:34) ?
- The big difference here is that Zechariah truly doubted in his heart
 - that he & his wife would be able to conceive.
 - He did not trust in the power of God above the laws of nature.
- The Immaculate Heart of Mary, however, knew no such doubt.
 - She was by no means questioning God's ability.
 - It simply was more of a wondering out loud,
 - an honest curiosity as to **how** God would bring this about,
 - since virginity and pregnancy are generally mutually exclusive...
- Gabriel understood this and gave her an explanation of sorts.
 - With the Holy Spirit, virginity and divine maternity do not contradict each other;
 - on the contrary, they integrate perfectly. As he said, *“With God, nothing is impossible.”* (Lk 1:37)

Secondly, Acceptance. Mary's wondering as to **how** God's will would be done

- very quickly became her Fiat: her Yes, Let it be done.

- *“Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word.”*
- Our Lady yields to God’s will with prompt obedience, unreservedly.
- St. Pope John Paul II says this acceptance is the crucial moment of faithfulness,
 - the moment in which man perceives
 - he may never completely understand the ‘how’
 - that in God’s plan there are often more areas of mystery than clarity.
- I am a woman and a virgin and yet... I shall be the Mother of God.
- I don’t fully understand -- but my faith in God is beyond my understanding.
 - My answer is still a resounding Yes, “Be it done unto me according to thy word.”

Next, John Paul reminds us that our callings must be lived with Consistency.

- After hearing and accepting God’s calling, we must then set out to live our lives in accordance with that calling;
 - to adapt one’s life to the calling and mission you have been given.
- You may not have all the information up front...
 - Mary was simply told that her virginity was not incompatible
 - with giving birth to the Son of God.
 - She was not told up front:
 - How to explain her pregnancy out of wedlock to religious authorities.
 - How to explain this to her fiancé Joseph
 - What type of upbringing would they provide Jesus:
 - where to live, what to do,

- and a million other details.
- But Mary simply began marching with the word she was given
 - doing the best she could with prayerful discernment.
 - Listening for follow-on guidance day-by-day...

A week or so ago I was out doing some Christmas shopping and got to chatting with the store owner. He shared with me a story that I think is a great example of listening for the voice of God on a daily basis:

- You know how every year there's a toy that's the hottest thing on the market...
- Back in the mid-1980's, some of you may remember,
 - the hottest toy on the market was the Cabbage Patch doll...
 - These cute, cuddly dolls were in high demand by kids of all ages
 - and were constantly sold out everywhere...
 - Well this guy had a friend in the toy business who
 - remarkably gave him 5 Cabbage Patch dolls! This was amazing!
 - He had 4 young daughters, so planned to give each of them a doll for Christmas. But what to do with the 5th doll?
 - Then the thought came to him to go to a particular hospital with the doll.
 - No guidance beyond that.
 - So he went, not sure where he was going when he got there
 - and ended up literally "randomly" entering a room down at the end of a long hallway...
 - He walked in and there was a sick little girl in the hospital bed
 - with her concerned parents at her bedside.

- He introduced himself and did his best trying to explain how he ended up there, ultimately saying,
 - “I think this doll is meant for you...”
 - Well the girl was elated, the parents crying
 - And the man emotional himself,
 - marveling at how God can work
 - thru the little things of our everyday lives
 - if only we are listening and willing to follow...

4. Lastly, and no less crucial, is Constancy – faith that stands the test of time...

To this St. Pope John Paul II says:

- *“All faithfulness must pass the most exacting test, that of **duration**... It’s easy to be consistent for a day or two. It is difficult to be consistent for one’s whole life. It is easy to be consistent in the hour of enthusiasm, it is difficult to be so in the hour of **tribulation**.”*

How do we respond when the magic or charm or excitement of our vocations fade?

- Do we fade with it or do we stay true to our calling..?

Today we are reminded thru this story of the calling of Mary

- that God has a calling for each of our lives too
 - Big blue-arrow type callings
 - that fundamentally change the direction of our lives.

- Am I called to be married or single or to the priesthood or religious life?
- Also, in our smaller, daily callings...
 - Like the shop owner whose story I shared
 - Whether at work or at school or with my family or alone
 - Am I listening – and responding to – that still small voice of the HS?
 - Or when I’m asked to volunteer around the parish?
 - Can I give even 1 hour a month to help out?

Today may we resolve to always listen for God’s callings, big & small alike

- And may our response echo that of our Blessed Mother:
 - I may not fully understand how
 - I may have a thousand smaller discernments along the way
 - But my answer will always be the same, enthusiastic:
 - Yes, Lord, yes -- wherever you lead I will follow!

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