

The Annunciation of the Lord
(Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10 / Luke 1:26-38)
25.03.2017

The word that guides my thought this morning is that little line found in the writings of St Paul, words he addressed to the Corinthians: *Consider your call.*

It seems to me that today's Solemnity – the Annunciation of the Lord – would have us remember our own vocation in life. I am sure we would all do well to recall those graced moments in our lives when the Lord intervened, inviting us to consent to His loving plan, asking us to accept that He work in and through us to give flesh to Christ in today's world.

I wonder if any of us really pay sufficient attention to the Lord's call in our lives. I wonder if we truly consider just how marvellous it is to have been invited to work with and for the Lord.

However simple, however ordinary, however insignificant our lives may appear to be on the surface of things, deep down within us we have all been confided the extraordinary mission of making Christ present to others.

It is our privilege to permit the Word of God to take flesh in our lives and through us in the life of the world in which we live.

This great honour carries with it an equally great responsibility.

In that word *responsibility* we find the word *response*.

This is where all must begin in our lives: in the response we give to God's call; in our humble response to the Lord's graciousness, a response proffered in faith and trust.

In the story of the Annunciation to Mary we see how the response of one person affected the destiny of many.

While vocation in the Bible is always something deeply personal, it always has social implications.

Our personal calling always has an impact far beyond us. It affects many others; we could say that it affects all others. When any human person says *yes* to God, agreeing to accomplish God's will in their life, the repercussions of his or her choice are felt far beyond themselves.

If we just think about that for ourselves we come to see how true this is.

Let's reflect upon it for a moment.

All of us were affected by our parents' choices. We could even say that we are all of us, to some extent, the fruit of our parent's choices.

In a similar manner, our decisions will inevitably affect and impact upon others.

It is important to bear this in mind. This should hold us to a greater sense of responsibility when it comes to the choices we make in life.

We should continually remind ourselves that our life is never just about any of us alone.

What I am saying here might sound just a bit much to some. It can take us aback to hear things formulated in this way, but the truth of the matter is that each one of us serves the economy of salvation by being what God calls us to be, by doing what He calls us to do – while never forgetting the fact that our free will comes into play and so we all have choices to make.

Emphasis upon our free will is important. God never forces us to be or to do anything. He

always invites us to choose to be and to do whatever may be asked of us.

It is the whole idea of human free will has the great Cistercian Father – St Bernard of Clairvaux – say that everything depended upon the *yes* of Mary given to God's call when it was made known to her by the angel.

We needed Mary to pronounce her word of consent for salvation to come into the world through Christ-Jesus.

The Bible is punctuated by the *yes* of all those who responded generously to God's call in their lives – from Abraham onwards. The *yes* which echoes throughout the Bible found its climax in the *yes* of Christ-Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews depicts the Only-Begotten Son of God as having come into the world with these words of the psalmist on his lips: *Yes. Behold I come to do Your will.*

I see a remarkable testimony to the humility of our God being made manifest in His willingness to depend on the response of humans to His action in their lives.

We see the humility of our God revealed in a most significant way when we consider how He chose to depend upon the awaited consent of one person, Mary, to her most extraordinary vocation. The Virgin's *fiat* was required the Lord could send the Redeemer He had promised to His people for the salvation of the whole world.

Mary's *yes* was nothing less than an echo that of the *yes* of the One she was to bear to the world, or rather it coincided with Christ's *yes* for He was already present within her. The angel's words to Mary show this to be true. When Gabriel greeted Mary, he did so with this wonderful salutation: *The Lord is with you.*

The first to be surprised by God's marvellous grace was Mary herself. *She was troubled by the angel's words and wondered what they could mean.* And yet – despite the questioning deep within her heart, her questions in regard to the unknown and all that still remained uncertain – Mary dared to say *yes* in graced freedom.

From the extraordinary moment onwards – when she was surprised by grace – Mary found the inner strength she needed to move forward. She took one step at a time, mysteriously held still in partial ignorance even as she journeyed, always animated by her great confidence in God's promises, fortified by her willing readiness to place total trust to the One who called her.

We can take it that when she gave her consent, Mary did not know where this would lead her. At Nazareth, she surely did not imagine that Calvary would be part of what would be asked of her.

Likewise, when we said *yes* to God, and as we continue to echo that say *yes* with the passage of the years, do any of us know where our consent will lead us?

As much as we can pray as we persevere in our *yes* to God, even as we traverse the night, are words of confident trust in the One who knows what is unknown to us. Newman's words come to mind here: *Lead kindly light.*

We can but marvel at Mary's wonderful and yet so simple relationship with her God.

The ancient Welsh poet rightly proclaims:

*The unwise can never perceive
How Mary is related to God:*

Her Son, her Father, her Lord.

*But I know, though I be but frail and earthly,
How Mary is bonded in the Spirit of the Trinity:
Her Son and brother in the flesh,
Her father, her Lord, her blessed almighty.*

I will like to draw this meditation to a close by further accentuating something present in those poetic lines and already touched on in what I have said hitherto: namely, the simplicity of Mary's relationship with her Lord and the humility of our God to have engaged in such an intimate relationship with her and through her with all humanity.

If I want to draw special attention to this aspect of Mary's relationship with her God this is because I am convinced that simplicity and humility should be at the very core of how we relate not only to the Lord, but also with others, as we seek to make Christ present in today's world.

Humility is a word which comes from the Latin root, *humus*, earth. The earth is the place of all true growth. For this reason it simply cannot be neglected. Without paying attention to it we won't grow as we are called to.

It is bearing this in mind that I leave the last words of my reflection to Caryll Houselander. I quote from her work *The Reed of God*. What she writes here are words that I suggest we might take and translate into our lives; seeking to live by them in our own *little way*.

I quote:

For nine months Christ grew in his Mother's body. By His own will she formed Him from herself, from the simplicity of her daily life. She had nothing to give Him but herself. He asked for nothing else. She gave Him herself.

Working, eating, sleeping, she was forming His body from hers. His flesh and blood. From her humanity she gave Him His humanity. Walking the streets of Nazareth to do her shopping, to visit her friends, she set His feet on the path of Jerusalem. Washing, weaving, kneading, sweeping, her hands prepared His hands for the nails. Every beat of her heart gave Him His heart to love with, His heart to be broken by love.

All her experience of the world about her was gathered to Christ growing in her. Looking upon the flowers she gave Him human sight. Talking with her neighbours, she gave Him a human voice. The voice we still hear in the silence of souls saying, 'Consider the lilies of the field'.

Sleeping in her still room she gave Him the sleep of the child in the cradle, the sleep of the young man rocked in the storm tossed boat. Breaking and eating bread, drinking wine of the country, she gave Him His flesh and blood; she prepared the Host for the Mass.

Today's Solemnity of the Annunciation, which our Anglican brothers and sisters call *Lady Day* and celebrate as the great Marian feast of their liturgical calendar, is celebrated by the Roman Church as a feast of the Lord: a celebration of the mystery of His incarnation.

It would have us give thanks for and engage ourselves to live ever more fully the mystery of our own incarnation, daring to see in it the way whereby God makes Himself manifest in today's world... in and through each one of us.

Amen!