March 25th: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:26-38): The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

"Hail, full of grace!"

Fr. Johannes VILAR
(Köln, Germany)

Today, in the "Hail, full of grace!" (Lk 1:28) we hear for the first time the name of the Mother of God: Mary (Archangel Gabriel's second phrase). She has the fullness of grace and the gifts. It is said like this: "keharitoméne", "full of grace" (Angel's greeting).

15 years old and alone, Mary has to answer in a way that will change the full history of mankind. Saint Bernard pleaded: "The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life." God is awaiting an uninhibited response, and the "full of grace",

representing all of us needing Redemption, responds: "génoitó", become! As of today, Mary is freely linked to the Work of her Son; today her Mediation begins. As of today, she is the Mother of those who are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI brought a special message for young people: “Reawaken the courage to make definitive decisions: they are really the only ones that allow us to grow, to move ahead and to reach something great in life. They are the only decisions that do not destroy our freedom but offer to point us in the right direction. Risk making this leap, so to speak, towards the definitive and so embrace life fully: this is something I would be happy to communicate to them.” Mary: here is an example!

And Saint Joseph is also included in God’s plans: he has to accept taking Mary as his wife and name her son (cf. Mt 1:20s): Jesus, “the Lord saves.” And He does it. Another example!

The Annunciation also reveals the Trinity: The Father sends the Son, incarnated by the Holy Spirit. And the Church sings: “And the Word becomes flesh today and makes his dwelling among us.” His redeeming work —Christmas, Good Friday, Easter— is present in this seed. He is Immanuel, “God with us” (cf. Is 7:15). Rejoice Humanity!

The festivities of Saint Joseph and the Annunciation prepare us excellently to celebrate the Paschal Mystery.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “And she who is to be the Mother of God trusts that her virginity will remain undiminished. Why should she doubt this new kind of conception, if she is promised that the Most High will bring his power into play? Her faith and confidence are further confirmed by the knowledge that Elizabeth has also obtained an unexpected fruitfulness: He who is capable of making a sterile woman conceive can do the same with a virgin woman.” (St. Leo the Great)

- "The angel leaves, the mission remains, and along with it the inner closeness to God matures.” (Benedict XVI)

- “The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ (Lk 1:37) and so giving her assent: ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word’ (Lk 1:38) (...)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 148)

Other comments

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Fr. Josep VALL i Mundó
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Annunciation of our Lord. With the angel Gabriel's announcement and Mary's acceptance of the explicit divine will of incarnation in her womb, God assumes the human condition and nature —“in everything equal to us, except for sin”— to exalt and elevate us as His sons and have us, thus, as partakers of His divine nature. The mystery of faith is so great that Mary, with this announcement, remains dismayed. Gabriel tells her: “Do not be afraid, Mary” (Lk 1:30): the Most High has looked kindly upon you and has chosen you to be the Mother of the Savior of the world. The divine initiatives break the weak human reasoning.

“Do not be afraid, Mary” Words we shall often read in the Gospels; the same Lord will repeat them to the Apostles when they closely feel the supernatural force and when they show their fear or fright before the extraordinary works of God. We may ask ourselves for the reasons of this fear. Is it an unreasonable fear, an irrational fright? No! For those who see themselves small and “poor” before God, that clearly feel their weakness, their feebleness before the greatness of the Divine and experience their nothingness before the magnificence of the Omnipotent, it is a logical fear. Pope Saint Leo wonders: “Who will not see his own feebleness in the same Christ?” Mary, the humble town maid, considers herself such a little thing... but in Christ she feels strong and her fear disappears!

Thus, we can clearly understand that God “chose the weak of the world to shame the strong” (1Cor 1:27). The Lord looks at Mary, sees the smallness of His servant and works history's greatest marvel in her: the Incarnation of the eternal Verb as Head of a renewed Humanity. How good Bernanos' words to the main character of The Joy can also be applied to the Virgin Mary: “An exquisite feeling of her own weakness comforted and soothed her wonderfully, because it was as an ineffable sign of God's presence in her; the same God shone in her heart.”