December 8th: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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.

"And coming to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.'"

Fr. David COMPTE i Verdaguer
(Manlleu, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the Gospel plays a chord made up of three notes. Three notes which, in our society, are not always that well-tuned: one note of doing, one of friendship and another one of coherence of life. Nowadays, we all have very busy lives, but, do we have a plan? Today, when we are navigating through a world of communications, are we capable of being alone in our own company for a while? Today, in the information era, are we letting it shape who we are?

Mary, a young woman "betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David" (Lk 1:28) has a plan, of

human proportions, evidently. However, God comes into her life to bestow on her another project... of divine proportions. Today, He wants to come into our lives too, to give our everyday human tasks divine proportions.

“Do not be afraid, Mary”. (Lk 1:30). Let's not do things just any way! Lest the addiction to "doing things" hides a void. Marriage, a life of servitude, our profession, should not mean a leap in the dark. “Full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). It is His presence that accompanies and provides a meaning to our life. It is trusting in God which —indirectly— brings us to trust others. It is the friendship with God that renews our friendship with others, too.

Today, when we are confronted with so many stimuli, often opposed, it is necessary to give shape and unity to our life. Saint Louis Mary Grignion says “Mary is the living mold of God” and explains: “A sculptor can make a statue in two ways: The first way, the chisel, is long and involved and open to all sorts of accidents. It only needs a faulty stroke of the chisel or hammer to ruin the whole work. The second, a mold, is quick, easy, straightforward, almost effortless and inexpensive, but the mold must be perfect and true to life and the material must be easy to handle and offer no resistance.” Mary is the perfect mold. Do we look to her as the role model for becoming ‘easy to handle material’?

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “God is the father of created things; and Mary is the mother of recreated things. For God begot Him by whom all things were made; and Mary gave birth to Him by whom all things were saved." (Saint Anselm)

- “The angel's greeting is interwoven with threads from the Old Testament. Mary is the shoot which sprouts from the stump of David in the dark winter night of history: from her sprouts the tree of redemption. God has not failed, as it might seem at the beginning of history: God saved and saves his people.” (Benedict XVI)

- The "splendor of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: she is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 492)