

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Anna, the wife of Joachim, gave birth to a daughter and lived in a little town which was the back of beyond. The town's name was Nazareth and the daughter's name was Mary. Mary was just an ordinary 13 year old Jewish girl but one day this girl, was visited by the archangel Gabriel, who addressed her, "**Rejoice so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.**"

The archangel addressed her thus because she was full of grace. It was of God's choosing, that Mary was full of grace. Mary had done nothing to deserve this grace. And as with all graces, it was simply a gift from God.

Mary was not expecting a messenger from God, she was somewhat shocked. So therefore, Mary was deeply troubled by his words. So, Gabriel assured her "**Do not be afraid; you have won God's favour.**"

Mary had never considered herself to be greater than any of God's people. She knew well, that God is the Father of the Israelites, and she knew well, the history of her people. Yet nothing had prepared her for this amazing announcement that would culminate in the fulfillment of that history. "**Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High....**"

But Mary's response had no ifs or buts, no worries about the past or future. She simply asked one question, "**But how can this come about, since I am a virgin.**" Only Mary, could have replied with just the one simple question, "**How?**"

Mary would have been unaware of her immaculate conception but would have been aware of its effects during her young life. The words of the angel must have brought to light all the sentiments, the questions, and the full range of her life's experiences. Gabriel's words must have illuminated every nuance of grace that acted within her, since her first moment of existence. Everything she had thought about herself, and questioned, but never spoken, suddenly became clear. Otherwise, she would have asked a lot more questions than just, "**How**".

Prayer is simply the pondering of the mystery of God and allowing Him to reveal himself. Mary would have been someone, who, when she didn't understand, she would have pondered everything in her heart.

So, when the angel Gabriel told her that "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow.**", I believe she must have understood what he said. Her answer certainly revealed her perception of reality, because she replied, "**I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me.**"

Mary must have been a very prayerful young girl, always open to the prompting of God, listening for sounds within her, like direct speech. She must have pondered the Scriptures, the Old Testament, its history and prophecies. But above all, Mary had faith in God, a trust in God. How else could she simply reply, here I am my Lord, I'm yours, do what you want. Are we like Mary? In a way, Yes we are! Because from our baptism and confirmation, and during our lives we receive graces, undeserved gifts from God. But they are not gifts for us, they are gifts for God, so that we can do things for him and his people.

Are we prayerful? Do we listen like Mary, to the voice within, speaking to us. Do we ponder Scripture and let the words of God infuse our hearts. Do we, in our prayer time sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to the Holy Spirit replay our Master's voice. To put it in a nutshell, are we open to the mysteries of God.

Can God rely on us, to do what He wants us to do, for him? Regardless of how small, or big, those jobs, do we say Yes! when he asks us. Perhaps the answer is No, because we don't pray or ponder, so we can't hear his request. Or say No, because we don't fancy doing that job, we prefer something different to do.

The big problem is that we can't see the big picture, only God knows that. If only, we were all open to God, we could come together and reveal his local plan for us. But if many of us don't pray then it will be like a jigsaw puzzle with most pieces missing.

For the remainder of today I ask you to ponder today's Gospel reading and ponder, would I say Yes? And then ponder, will I say Yes? to what God wants me to do for Him, and his people. And then say thank you to Mary ... for saying Yes!.