

Advent IV  
12/24/2023

## OUR LADY OF GREAT COURAGE

The Annunciation of Mary that we just heard is a beautiful, moving story with which we are familiar and that has been depicted countless times over in art. But stop and think about what it must have been like for this young woman. Think of the greatly varied mix of emotions and reactions she faced in such a short time: fear, surprise, amazement, curiosity, wonder, humility, receptivity, cooperation, obedience.

And then there is at least one more: courage. Think of the courage that dwelt within her to take in all these different and complex feelings within minutes and then to respond: *Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.* With the cooperation of Mary, God's plan literally comes to life. Among the many titles given to the Blessed Mother, perhaps we should add another: Our Lady of Great Courage. Mary had the courage to cooperate with God's plan.

Mary was open to God's invitation which was also an interruption. These are often interruptions whether large or small in our lives which are also invitations: a child who is sick, a friend who needs someone with whom to talk, a neighbor in need of help. –Once while having dinner with a family I asked the husband and wife how they met and they told me that they had literally bumped into each other at work. I'm romantic enough to think that maybe God was at work in that. The story of salvation is so often a story of interruptions. God interrupts people's lives to bring about good.

Mary set out on a journey of faith receiving Jesus in her heart before receiving him in her body. To her was revealed the Mystery of the Trinity: *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.* God was with her in more ways than one but her life was anything but a cakewalk. In minutes her world was turned inside out and upside down forever. She set out on a journey of faith.

She dealt with what from the human side of things was an unplanned pregnancy and possible shame. She journeyed to Bethlehem nine months with child, she gave birth in the equivalent of a parking garage, she had to flee in the middle of night because someone wanted to kill her baby, she was an exile, an immigrant, living

in a foreign land, she had a lost child—for three days, she watched her son be scorned and tortured to death publicly and she was the mother of a victim of capital punishment. Jesus would talk about the price of following him and Mary did that. Mary didn't live inside a gold edged holy card but was a real woman who faced real problems of life with a real faith in God.

The Virgin Mary is for us not just a mother but a teacher as well. There are annunciations in our own lives as well: a job offer, a marriage proposal, an invitation, an interruption. These may be human or divine or they may be ways that the Divine works through the human. In those instances we can experience so many of the feelings that Mary did: fear, surprise, amazement, curiosity, wonder, humility, receptivity, obedience. We can recoil, protest and object. We can respond in so many different ways.

But like Mary, we can also show hospitality to the word of God and accept what is being offered. Like Mary, we can respond with great courage to a journey of faith, a journey of intentional faith that may take us places we could not imagine, that would be anything but a cakewalk but an adventure of faith we make knowing that God is with us.

Here in the Eucharist we celebrate the presence of Jesus on the altar but the first altar Jesus rested upon was Mary. Here we come together not as members of the Jesus Christ fan club but as members of the body of Christ connected to one another to Jesus who is head of that body. Here we listen to God's Word trying to make room for it in our own hearts. Here the living word that was made flesh continues to dwell among us under the forms of bread and wine to strengthen, nourish and encourage us on our journey of faith. After each worthy communion we can say, *Jesus born of Mary, now born in me. Jesus born of Mary, now born in us.*

May Our Lady of Great Courage always assist with her prayers, inspire us to cooperate with God in faith and always give us an example to follow.