

## ANNUNCIATIONS IN OUR LIVES

May 14, 1993. It was a Friday I was coming up on the second anniversary of my ordination as a priest. After arranging an appointment, I was visiting with Bishop Sullivan making a courtesy call. It was springtime when rumors of clergy moves can fly. The bishop said, *Tell me about your new assignment.* Knowing that he had a sense of humor, I thought he was joking and said, *You tell me. It's a big place* he said. I replied, *Are you serious?* His response was, *Are you Joe Cisetti?* That's when I found out I would be leaving my first assignment as a priest and coming to St. Therese. It was shocking, saddening and exciting. I was taken aback but, with some fear, I said yes. It was an annunciation in my life. And I am glad I said yes.

In each of our lives there are annunciations. Sometimes there are big ones but there are also smaller, even daily ones. Marriage proposals, job offers and college acceptance letters are all annunciations. Someone calling you up and asking for help may be an annunciation. Our lives are full of annunciations and God can be at work in at least some of them, but what we hear in today's gospel we rightly call *the* Annunciation. The Annunciation that changed the history of the world.

Central to Catholic thought is the insistence that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God, ultimately, that we have the ability to make a gift of ourselves to others which means we have the ability to love and when we truly love, we become more god-like, more holy.

While the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, someone has noted that humanity has returned the favor. We can try to form God into our own image and likeness that serves as a reflection of ourselves, and that becomes an idol.

One author has noted that it may be an idol of an unduly harsh, demanding God trying to catch us for the very least infraction that might enter our minds. If we hold to an unduly harsh God we can become unduly harsh people

Or it may also be the idol of a God of convenience. A vague god that simply confirms us in all our decisions and in our way of life. One that never challenges or

disturbs us but simply reinforces what we want to hear telling us that we don't need to change anything about ourselves. Holding to an easy God of convenience can make us a spiritually weak and flabby people. Both the idol of unduly harsh God and that of a God of convenience are caricatures that fall short of who God is.

Mary is minding her own business. Her life is on its way and within a few brief minutes, her world is turned inside out and upside down and it will never be the same again. She is frightened. She asks a question and then says yes. She doesn't say, *No thanks. I have everything planned out already.* She says, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* It has been noted that in the Garden of Gethsemane in what is called, his agony, Jesus prayed, *Father, not my will but thine be done.* Jesus said *Yes.* At the annunciation Mary said yes. Perhaps on the human side of things, Jesus learned that from his mother.

Hers was not a god of convenience and hers would not be a life of convenience. Mary faced possible shame, what from the human side of things was an unplanned pregnancy, traveling full term, she was temporarily homeless, she gave birth in the equivalent of a garage, she had to flee for her life in the middle of the night, she was a refugee, an immigrant in a foreign land, she had a lost child, she saw her son endure a torturous death, she was the mother of a condemned criminal who received capital punishment. Ad the body of her once infant son, to whom she gave life, she would again hold in her arms, lifeless. The Blessed Mother did not live inside a stained glass window. She was a real woman, who faced real problems of life with a real faith in God, a very intentional faith in God.

Her god was not a false god of convenience but the living God to whom she gave a human nature so that God could share life with us and so that God could be made human and dwell among us. In Jesus, God's love would be made visible. He comes to die and rise from the dead and draw us into the life of God, the Blessed Trinity.

There is an interesting detail to this gospel. When Mary asks how this is to be, Gabriel says, *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.* In other words, the Trinity, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is revealed to Mary.

Jesus enters into the world truly God and truly human. He received his humanity from Mary. The Blessed Mother received Jesus in her heart before receiving him in her body. She models for all of us, men and women, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus—to receive the word of God in our hearts, to let that word take life in us and for us to then share it with the world.

Here in the Eucharist Jesus, the word made flesh, continues to enter into our world and here we strive to show hospitality to that word made flesh in our hearts, in our bodies and in our lives. Like Mary, with intentional faith and courage, may we say *Yes* to God's call. To the annunciations of our own lives, may we too say, *Yes*.