

A Mary Christmas

By Bishop Victor Galeone

For this month's message, I would like to take us back to last July, to the closing of World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia. Before reciting the midday Angelus with almost half a million people gathered at Randwick Racecourse, Pope Benedict compared the scene of the Annunciation to a marriage proposal from God, to which Mary - on behalf of the human race - said Yes. The Holy Father's remarks follow.

Dear Young Friends,

In the beautiful prayer that we are about to recite, we reflect on Mary as a young woman, receiving the Lord's summons to dedicate her life to him in a very special way, a way that would involve the generous gift of herself, her womanhood, her motherhood. Imagine how she must have felt. She was filled with apprehension, utterly overwhelmed at the prospect that lay before her.

The angel understood her anxiety and immediately sought to reassure her. "Do not be afraid, Mary The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." It was the Spirit who gave her the strength and courage to respond to the Lord's call. It was the Spirit who helped her to understand the great mystery that was to be accomplished through her. It was the Spirit who enfolded her with his love and enabled her to conceive the Son of God in her womb.

This scene is perhaps the pivotal moment in the history of God's relationship with his people. During the Old Testament, God revealed himself partially, gradually, as we all do in our personal relationships. It took time for the chosen people to develop their relationship with God. The Covenant with Israel was like a period of courtship, a long engagement.

Then came the definitive moment - the moment of marriage - the establishment of a new and everlasting covenant. As Mary stood before the Lord, she represented the whole of humanity. In the angel's message, it was as if God made a marriage proposal to the human race. And in our name, Mary said "Yes."

In fairy tales, the story ends there, and all "live happily ever after." In real life it is not so simple. For Mary there were many struggles ahead, as she lived out the consequences of the "yes" that she had given to the Lord. Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her heart. When Jesus was twelve years old, she experienced every parent's worst nightmare when, for three days, the child went missing. And after his public ministry, she suffered the agony of witnessing his crucifixion and death. Throughout her trials she remained faithful to her promise, sustained by the Spirit of courage. And she was gloriously rewarded.

We too must remain faithful to the "yes" that we have given to the Lord's offer of friendship. We know that he will never abandon us. We know that he will always sustain us through the gifts of the Spirit. Mary accepted the Lord's "proposal" in our name.

So let us turn to her and ask her to guide us as we struggle to remain faithful to the life-giving relationship that God has established with each one of us. She is our role model and our inspiration. She intercedes for us with her Son, and with a mother's love she shields us from harm.

I would like to close with a simple, anonymous hymn, entitled, Mary the Dawn. It was slightly reworked by the Dominican Sisters of Summit.

Mary the dawn, Christ the Perfect Day;
Mary the gate, Christ the Heavenly Way!

Mary the root, Christ the Mystic Vine;
Mary the grape, Christ the Sacred Wine!

Mary the wheat, Christ the Living Bread;
Mary the stem, Christ the Rose blood-red!

Mary the font, Christ the Cleansing Flood;
Mary the cup, Christ the Saving Blood!

Mary the temple, Christ the temple's Lord;
Mary the shrine, Christ the God adored!

Mary the beacon, Christ the Haven's Rest;
Mary the mirror, Christ the Vision Blest!

Mary the mother, Christ the mother's Son;
By all things blest while endless ages run. Amen.

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A Mary Christmas, everyone!