

Whose agenda are you following? Your own agenda or God's agenda? Whose will are you doing? Your own will or God's will? Whose kingdom are you building up? Your own kingdom or God's kingdom?

What about Mary celebrated in this feast of the annunciation? She was certainly not following her own agenda, or doing her own will, or building her own kingdom when she said 'Yes' to the angel Gabriel, to become the mother of Jesus; "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Think of the consequences it could have had for her. She could have been stoned to death according to the law (Deut 22:20-21). For that reason Mary knew that from the human point of view she may not even be able to bring her pregnancy to its full term, but she had faith to believe that what is impossible for us, is possible for God. And so with that faith she said "yes." She surrendered into the hands of God, and it really was surrendering, because she did not know what the consequences would be. However, Mary had faith to believe that no matter what difficulties would follow, God would provide a way out and a remedy. Mary's final words to the angel are a model for each of us, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) And because Mary surrendered to God, Jesus came.

Mary shows us how to be a follower of Jesus, making a loving surrender into the hands of God who loves us. When we wonder if we can make such an act of trust and abandonment into the hands of God, let us remember that

when God calls us, he also gives us the grace and strength to complete the task.

Today we rejoice with our Sister Dorothea, 101 and still going strong! When Dorothea entered the Convent served her noviciate, and made her Solemn Profession before God, 75 years ago, it was an act of loving surrender into the hands of God, who loves us and sustains us.

Surrendering to God, making that act of trust or abandonment into the hands of God, is not easy. It means letting go and like Mary facing into the unknown, and the unknown scares us. I have found the following passage from a book by Sr. Ruth Burrows helpful,

“The proud cannot bring themselves to hold out empty hands to God, they insist on offering virtues, good works, self denials, anything in order not to have nothing. They want to be beautiful for him from their own resources, whereas we are beautiful only because God looks on us and makes us beautiful. God cannot give himself to us unless our hands are empty to receive him. The deepest reason why so few of us are saints is because we will not let God love us. To be loved means a naked, defenceless surrender to all God is. It means a glad acceptance of our nothingness, a look fixed only on the God who gives, taking no account of the nothing to whom the gift is made.” This quotation was taken from Guidelines for Mystical Prayer by Sr. Ruth Burrows)

Dorothea was Mother for a long period at a time of great change in the life of the Church, change was made in the outward side of convent life, the habit, the chapel, and interiorly, a return to the root charism of the Order, a kind of radicalisation of the religious life.

Another spiritual writer of our times, Thomas Merton, a Cistercian, has said,

“The whole Christian life is a life in which the further a person progresses, the more they have to depend directly on God...The more we progress, the less we are self-sufficient. The more we progress, the poorer [in spirit] we get so that the person who has progressed most, is totally poor [in spirit] - he or she has to depend directly on God.”
This is a quotation taken from Monastic Spirituality: Citeaux Tape AA2083 by Thomas Merton.

We are all faced with a decision like Mary, and also Dorothea. Will we surrender to God, and allow God to do what from our human point of view seems impossible? Will we surrender our agenda, our will and our kingdom to God, and allow God’s agenda, will and kingdom to become a reality? When Mary surrendered, Jesus came.

To help us surrender like Mary, Fr. Charles de Foucauld of the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, has written a very famous Prayer of Abandonment:

*Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures -
I wish no more than this, O Lord.*

Into your hands I commend my soul:

*I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so I need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.”*

Some parts of that prayer are more difficult to pray than others, “do with me whatever you will” and, “I am ready for all, I accept all.” It requires faith and trust like Mary to pray that with the heart, but when we do, then Jesus can come. Jesus cannot come if we do not surrender. On the first Christmas Jesus came because Mary surrendered to God and said ‘yes.’ Will Jesus come to you? Let us surrender our agenda, our will and our kingdom to God like Mary, so that Jesus will have room to come to us.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Blessing of Sister Dorothea:

God our Father, we ask you to bless our Sister Dorothea. Thanking you that she was humble enough to surrender her life to you in Profession 75 years ago. Thank you for the great blessing she is to us in the Community, and in the Convents, and schools where she taught and been Head. Dorothea, may God richly Bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always, Amen.