

Fourth Sunday of Advent: The Word in Mary's Ear and Ours

I love art, all forms of art. I love music and opera and ballet. I love sculpture and architecture. I particularly love painting. My favorite place in the world that is not a church is the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It is not that I don't like the other famous art museums, like the Louvre in Paris, the Uffizi in Florence, the Prado in Madrid, and, of course, the Vatican Museums. But I first fell in love with art at the Met.

A few years ago I was roaming the Met with an audio guide stuck in my ear. I came upon a medieval painting of the scene depicted in today's Gospel, the scene we usually call the Annunciation. I don't know why, but I decided to punch in the numbers and listen to the commentary on this particular work of art. The narrator pointed out the various different technical elements of the painting and then spoke about the dove over Mary and the Angel's head. The dove represented, of course, the Holy Spirit. Rays of light emanated from the dove and seemed to be entering into one of Mary's ears. In this painting, the narrator went on, the artist depicted the quaint theory that since Mary was a virgin and remained a virgin, the conception of Jesus took place through her ears leaving the rest of her body virginal. The narrator missed the artist's point. The artist's point was that Mary heard the Word of God. That was why the Holy Spirit was able to overshadow her. That was how the Word of God became flesh through her.

Mary was given a choice. The world waited for her answer. She could have refused to allow God's plan to work through her. She could have agreed grudgingly to the plan, like Zechariah, John the Baptist's father did when the Angel Gabriel spoke to him in the Temple, or Mary could have rejected God's plan. But Mary was open to the Word of God. She allowed the Word to enter her and transform her from a simple maiden to the mother of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, to the Queen of the Universe. She was open to the Word of God, and the Word of God used her to transform the world. The what of Jesus, what is he, is human and divine, two natures. But the who of Jesus, who is he, is always the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Mary said "Yes!" to the Word in her ear and became the Mother of God.

That same Word of God whispers into our ears, yours and mine. He calls us to continue the transformation of the world. He calls us to make the Savior real to those who long for his presence. Will we reject the Word and force Him to look for another ear? Will we obey grudgingly and limit His action through us? Or will we make a decision for the Lord, and offer ourselves totally to God?

We are here because we have chosen Jesus Christ. We recognize our humanity, our weakness, and we seek strength to remain faithful to this choice. Mary's great virtue was her obedience. In contrast to Eve, Mary, the New Eve, brought new life, Divine Life, to the world.

The Word of God calls us to nurture the presence of Christ within us. We are not pregnant like Mary became, but we still have the Living Jesus within us. Like an

expectant mother, all of us care for this new and wonderful presence. We eat the food we need, the Eucharist, to allow this Presence to grow. We take the vitamins we need, Vitamin P, prayer, so we can stay united to the Living Love within us.

The Word of God whispers into our ears and calls upon us to bring this Divine Presence within us to others. We do this by standing up for our faith. We do this by searching out for those who need His Strength. So many people hurt at Christmas time. People who have lost loved ones need special attention. People who are wandering the world listlessly, from thing to thing, need special care. People who are sick and elderly and wondering if this will be their last Christmas, need the assurance that God's love will usher them an eternal Christmas.

What a wonderful time we are living in. Not just Christmas time. We are living in the time of the Word of God. His Presence is within us. His Presence is around us. His presence is real. He is Real.

The Word of God whispered into Mary's ear, and she conceived. The Word of God is shouting into our ears, and we are transforming the world with His Presence.

Hail Mary, Full of Grace. Because you let God work within you, we have become the Masterpiece of His Hand.