



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL GROUP CATECHESIS

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT • YEAR B

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Our Response to Jesus

LUKE 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour.

Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will



be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow.

And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



Today, the Fourth and last Sunday of Advent, the Liturgy wants to prepare us for Christmas, now at the door, by inviting us to

meditate on the angel's annunciation to Mary. The archangel Gabriel reveals to the Virgin the Lord's will that she become the mother of his Only-Begotten Son. Let us fix our gaze on this simple girl from Nazareth, at the moment she offers herself to the divine message with her "yes"; let us grasp two essential aspects of her attitude, which is for us the model of how to prepare for Christmas.

First of all her faith, her attitude of faith, which consists in listening to the Word of God in order to abandon herself to this Word with full willingness of mind and heart. Responding to the angel, Mary said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). In her "behold" filled with faith, Mary does not know by what road she must venture, what pains she must suffer, what risks she must face. But she is aware that it is the Lord asking and she entrusts herself totally to Him; she abandons herself to his love. This is the faith of Mary!

Another aspect is the capacity of the Mother of Christ to recognize God's time. Mary is the one who made possible the Incarnation of the Son of God, "the revelation of the mystery

which was kept secret for long ages" (Rom 16:25). She made possible the Incarnation of the Word thanks to her humble and brave "yes". Mary teaches us to seize the right moment when Jesus comes into our life and asks for a ready and generous answer. And Jesus is coming. Indeed, the mystery of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem took place historically more than 2,000 years ago but occurs as a spiritual event in the "today" of the Liturgy. The Word, who found a home in the virgin womb of Mary, comes in the celebration of Christmas to knock once again at the heart of every Christian. He comes and knocks.

Each of us is called to respond, like Mary, with a personal and sincere

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“yes”, placing oneself fully at the disposal of God and of his mercy, of his love. How many times Jesus comes into our lives, and how many times he sends us an angel, and how many times we don’t notice because we are so taken, immersed in our own thoughts, in our own affairs and even, in these days, in our Christmas preparations, so as not to notice Him who comes and knocks at the door of our hearts, asking for acceptance, asking for a “yes” like Mary’s. A saint used to say: “I am afraid that the Lord will come”. Do you know what the fear was? It was the fear of not noticing and letting Him pass by.

When we feel in our hearts: “I would like to be a better man, a better

woman.... I regret what I have done...”. That is the Lord knocking. He makes you feel this: the will to be better, the will to be closer to others, to God. If you feel this, stop. That is the Lord! And go to prayer, and maybe to confession, cleanse yourselves... this will be good. But keep well in mind: if you feel this longing to be better, He is knocking: don’t let Him pass by!

In the mystery of Christmas, at Mary’s side there is the silent presence of St Joseph, as he is portrayed in every nativity scene. The example of Mary and Joseph is for us all an invitation to accept, with total openness of spirit, Jesus, who for love made Himself our brother. He comes to bring to the world the gift of peace: “on earth peace

among men with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14), as the choirs of angels proclaimed to the shepherds. The precious gift of Christmas is peace, and Christ is our true peace. And Christ knocks at our hearts to grant us peace, peace of the soul. Let us open our doors to Christ!

Let us entrust ourselves to the intercession of our Mother and of St Joseph in order to experience a truly Christian Christmas, free of all worldliness, ready to welcome the Saviour, God-among-us.

DISCUSS TOGETHER

1. Describe a time when you have taken a step of faith, a step of a full ‘yes’ to something not knowing how it would turn out or what paths to take?
2. What are your hopes and fears around saying a complete ‘yes’ to Jesus and his presence, will and leadership in your life?
3. Pope Francis writes that if you feel a longing to be better, a longing to be closer to God and to others then it is Jesus who is knocking: don’t let Him pass by! Describe how you have felt this longing in your life, especially over the past few weeks. How would you like to respond?

PRAY TOGETHER

Pray for Each Other

- Invite each member to share an intention for which they would like prayer
- As a group pray out loud for each person in turn

Response

Jesus, I entrust myself to you.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, as we come to celebrate your birth, draw us closer to you that we may respond ever more completely to your will in our lives. Amen