

## "Saying Yes to a Deeper Faith"

Homily of December 22, 2002

by Fr. Gerry Murphy

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*She was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered  
what sort of greeting this might be*

And so she might well ponder! Picture the scene: it's ancient Palestine; a young teenage Jewish girl is cleaning up around her home or drawing water from the local fountain when suddenly, she receives this strange angelic visitation with its even stranger and mysterious message. Think about what Mary was being asked. Here we have a teenage girl, betrothed but not yet married to Joseph, himself in all probability not much older than her, being asked to become pregnant through an outside source. Now engagement in ancient Palestine was already regarded as a full commitment to one's future spouse and for such a girl to lose her virginity through some other party was tantamount to adultery. The punishment was death by stoning at her father's house. Sure, the angel Gabriel gave Mary every assurance that this was the work of God and all would be well. But how was she going to explain her pregnancy to Joseph? Her family? And indeed to all who knew her? Not to mention explaining its daunting and enormous implications for their lives. Is it any wonder that Mary was afraid? That she questioned and doubted?

But even in her darkest moments of doubt Mary did not say No to what God called her to be, the mother of Jesus, the messiah, the anointed one. Mary's greatness here, I believe, lies not in some kind of pious acquiescence to an angelic request, but rather in her simple and profound Yes to that which she did not fully understand or comprehend. Her greatness is in her faith, strong and profound and mature beyond her tender years.

Think about what Mary was saying Yes to. She was not only saying 'Yes' to mothering a sweet little infant boy. She was also saying 'Yes' to everything that would follow her becoming Jesus' mother. She was saying 'Yes' to the vicious attacks made on her Son's character later on, to his total rejection by the religious and civil establishment of his own people, and to the appallingly brutal treatment leading to his execution as a public criminal.

So, Mary's giving birth to Jesus was a mysterious and puzzling event conceived in the darkness of her troubled soul, but brought forth into the light of her tremendous courage and faith. Mary's Yes to God radiated with a glowing maturity of faith. She responded not because she understood but because she believed.

How do we respond in our lives to the questions asked of our faith and moral integrity?

How do I respond when my marriage, in spite of my and my spouse's best efforts, comes apart at the seams? How do I respond when my health breaks down leaving me unemployed and unemployable for the foreseeable future? How do I respond when the doctors tell me that there is nothing more they can do for my son hooked up to a life-support system? Or how do I respond when those I look to for moral leadership and guidance fail me and mislead me? The shifting sands of life's ups and downs are the testing grounds for our faith and moral development. We are invited not so much to change as to be in transition: to be ever willing to let go of what hinders our spiritual growth, so that we can become more fully God's loving and compassionate creation in harmony with all of life.

Sometimes it is through dark passages of suffering and death that the Christ Child shall lead us, stripping us of every hindrance we have gathered over the years, until we don the mature faith of his mother. Mary did not remain a teenager and Jesus did not remain a baby in swaddling clothes in a manger. They both grew in wisdom and maturity of faith. Pious, childish and sentimental faith will not serve us well for the radically demanding journey across desert, mountain and river that constitutes our life's story. Something more and something deeper is needed.

I would like to conclude with the opening prayer of our mass this morning. Pray it with me in the quiet of your hearts and listen carefully to its spirituality: Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as one of us, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen