

Annunciation 2020

IS 7:10-14; 8:10; HEB 10:4-10; LK 1:26-38

Today we celebrate the feast day of our parish - a day that commemorates one of the greatest events of all time. On this day, God takes on human flesh in the womb of Mary, on this day a partnership is forged between God and humanity that was like nothing anyone could have expected. When God promised to come and to save humanity no one thought it would be like this, and also when God answers his promises to us personally - a lot of times it is not how we expect. At this particular time we are worried and are looking for God's action - but to be able to realize that action, we have to be willing to place situations into God's hands - realizing that God has plans in place that we could never even dream of.

In many ways this feast is about changed expectations. Mary had many expectations. She was engaged to Joseph and must have had a lot of plans of what her life was going to be like. All that changed with the visit of the Angel. She now had a whole new set of things to expect. The woman who was going to remain a virgin - was going to have a child,; the life that was going to be pretty standard and uncomplicated - got very complicated. We all have had to adjust to changing expectations too. The parish staff scrambled the whole first week of this epidemic to change plans that had been made months ago, and to devise procedures that we never thought would have to be made. People have had their work plans changed, daily gathering altered, income curtailed, visit plans and trips cancelled ... it is not how we all expected to spend our March and April this year. But notice that Mary did not try to fight the change to her plans, she did not pine and moan and argue with the Angel. She didn't ask why God selected her, she didn't demand that God give her something in return for her service. She simply says *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done ... according to your word.* She trusts God, she trusts that there is a greater plan and that God will ultimately protect and bring that plan about. Jesus' death might have seemed to be proof that God dropped the ball not is one - but again God defies expectations and the resurrection becomes what was planned all along.

This event of the incarnation of Jesus that we celebrate today is part of a fulfillment of God's promises to be with us. It is God doing what God said in a way that no one expected. When God speaks through the prophet in the first reading and says: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us!"* Expectations of a God who would come down as a powerful warrior on a horse and smash enemies are replaced by the reality of a God who comes a

a little baby and sacrifices himself out of love for us. No one understood that Jesus being called Emanuel meant God would be with us - in the flesh. That the invisible God would come to be with us deeply and personally. No one knew that God would take on a human body, that he would die and rise and in that glorified body after the resurrection would be able to be shared over and over again in the Eucharist - but that is what God did. Mary knew none of this she simply trusted and said *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done ... according to your word.*

But, you may say, Mary was saying yes to a plan that was a wonderful thing for humanity, but now we are in a pandemic that doesn't seem to be a good thing for humanity. Yet know that God will find ways to use this situation positively somehow - that is how God foils evils like illness. We may not know how God will use this situation at this point - but neither did Mary know what was on the other side of the crucifixion. We know that God only creates and does good. God may allow illness to operate for reasons we don't fully understand, but when God does act it is only to heal, not to make sick - and God will act to protect and heal many people before this is over. In the face of uncertainty for the future can we have the same faith Mary did in the face of her uncertainty. Jesus himself follows the will of the Father through evils that were not of God's making - he follows the will of God and God turns things around in a totally unexpected way. In the second reading, the writer is reflecting that Jesus following the Father's will brought about the reconciliation with the Father that was planned. He says: *By this "will," we have been consecrated through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all.* God's will only brings about an eventual good in the midst of evil for those who give themselves to it.

Jesus follows the will of the Father and brings us salvation, Mary - a human like us - follows God's plan and has the great privilege to be part of that plan. She is an example of faith, of allowing God to enter and make a dwelling in her, a model of surrendering to the will of God when the future seems unsure. The key to greater peace and purpose is to turn to God in this time that has disrupted our expectations. We should say with Mary: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done ... according to your word.* It is by this surrender to God that we will find our part to play in the plan of God to overcome this evil, it is by surrendering to God's will that we will find the peace of knowing that God can bring good out of any evil eventually, it is in surrender that we can let go of our expectations - for it is really our expectations that generate the fear that plagues us in this time. It is only by having true faith in the will and plan of God - and surrendering to it - that will find the peace that we seek.