

On March 25, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation. “The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.” Lk 1: 26 Nine months prior to Christmas, we celebrate this event where the incarnation took place. The salutation of the angel states that Mary *is* full of grace. The angel says the child will be called great; Son of the Most High; he will have the throne of David his father; his kingdom will never end. Mary knows that she will give birth to the Messiah. The clarifying question about how this will take place shows the role of the Holy Spirit. This is different than Sarah, or the mother of Sampson or Samuel. It is the same as the Spirit of God overshadowing the tabernacle which contains the ark of the covenant. (Ex 40: 34-35; 2 Chron 5: 13-14)

Did Mary know who her son was? A popular song poses this question during Christmas. What is the nature of this question? Perhaps, those who wrote and sang this song have experienced Jesus Christ in a new way and are trying to imagine anyone having an experience of the same gravity. They are overwhelmed by Jesus, and rightly so, because their song is one of joy and amazement in knowing Jesus. This subjective experience of God's grace, though possibly real, is apparently so wonderful that it has them call into question Mary's relation with her son, Jesus Christ. They are comparing their relationship to Jesus with the relationship Mary has with her son. If Mary did not know who Jesus was, when would the realization of who Jesus truly is take place?

The song “Mary Did You Know?” must speak of a profound yearning to be closer to Christ. The hunger of the soul is very evident. Nevertheless, the song's message does not sit well with Catholic Tradition and Scripture. An angel speaks to Mary and says she is full of grace. Elizabeth says to Mary “How is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” Mary at the wedding at Cana understands the problem and tells the servers to listen to Jesus, “Do whatever he tells you.” We receive Mary as our Mother at the foot of the Cross. Sure, the classic argument to attack Mary is to highlight the Gospel passages that speak of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Sacred Tradition has always supported the perpetual virginity of Mary. Furthermore, think of this question. Is Mary not fulfilled in giving birth to Jesus, the savior of the world? Does she need more children to fulfill her? Constant attacks on Mary, subtle or overt, are attacks on the Incarnation.

Without Mary, Jesus has no body and there is no redemption through the cross, and the redemption of Christ is ongoing. To understand Christ Jesus, we must always look to Mary. To do otherwise calls into question the incarnation. Let us remember that those who authored this song do not profess the Catholic Faith and do not hold to Sacred Tradition. Romano Guardini wrote, “Anyone who would understand the nature of the tree should examine the earth that encloses the roots, the soil from which its sap climbs into branch, blossom and fruit. Similarly, to understand the person of Jesus Christ, one would do well to look to the soil that brought Him forth: Mary, his mother.” The false construct of the dichotomy forcing Jesus and Mary to be opposed to each other comes from people who do not understand Mary's role, and essentially, weaken the truth of the incarnation.

The Way of Jesus is the Way of Mary. The Blessed Virgin Mary is intrinsic to the economy of salvation. And, salvation is ongoing. Jesus, the incarnate WORD of the Father is on a mission and Mary always applies the humanity. Jesus makes the circuit of salvation through Mary. Christ Jesus comes in history once and then continually comes to us in mystery. Mary says yes, not just once, but for all time in her continual yes. The Son descends to us through Mary from whom he receives humanity, and then the Son ascends to the Father bringing redeemed humanity to heaven. Even in Sacred Tradition, Mary's humanity is assumed into heaven. The son is always being sent into the world because grace is always at work. “The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for

the ungodly.” (Rom 5: 5-6) Therefore, Mary continues to participate in the ongoing saving Mystery of Christ, because Mary says yes perfectly to God in her simplicity and her poverty of Spirit. In this is our hope.

This is not to say that Mary is omniscient and knows what will happen at the turn of each corner. When the angel speaks to her she is perfectly receptive. When the shepherds come to the stable she is receptive, open and giving. When Simeon says that a sword will pierce her heart, Mary understands that her son will be the salvation and downfall of many, and that there will be suffering. She is united to her son in his life, suffering and death. In her poverty, not only seen in the physical reality of the stable, but more importantly, in her poverty of spirit she allows the goodness she encounters in the world to minister to her: e.g. the care St. Joseph gives to her; the shepherds; Simeon in the temple.

Mary is the essential stop and portal for salvation. She is the “return” in the conduit of grace. She is not the passive individual who appears one day a year at Christmas. Mary's heart is for Jesus the living echo of the Father's eternal bosom. This divine trembling, an effect of the gift of fear, far from paralyzing the tenderness and love of her maternal heart, enables her to blossom in a much deeper way. No mother has ever pressed her little one to her heart with greater tenderness than Mary; no mother has ever shown more delicacy and respect for his fragility.

In our lives, we want to say yes to God, though we do so imperfectly. There is a defect in us in the midst of our yes. Mary in her true poverty receives perfectly the Word and is able to say yes. She is pure “yes.” Nothing about her is a private possession: her being, her life or her will. Selfishness is not present because she totally gives to God. We, on the other hand and with much pride, cannot accept God's ways because we cannot understand them. We want a sign more than we want to have faith. Jesus always praised those who had faith over those who asked for a sign. Mary was humble. Humility enables our intelligence to avoid setting human limits to God's Word by adapting it to our natural needs. Humility puts us in proper relation to God. It makes us realize our lowliness and the limitations of our human perspective as compared to God's plans. Every time we say “Hail full of grace the Lord is with you,” we are saying we want that grace, in its humility and hope, to be with us as well.

The song we hear on the radio, at various churches, and even during the Mass spawns confusion. It cannot coexist with the *Memorare*, *Salve Regina*, *Ave Maria*, and the numerous liturgies and Sacred teachings of the Church on the person of Mary. Even in the Orthodox Tradition of the Divine Liturgy, Mary is proclaimed the *panagia*, the All Holy. To sing “Mary Did You Know?” at Mass does not sit well with the tradition of Catholic *lex orandi-lex credendi*, law or manner of worship is the law of belief.

The closer a person is to God, the closer he is to people. We see this in Mary. The fact that she is totally with God is the reason why she is so close to human beings. For this reason she can be the Mother of every consolation and every help, a Mother whom anyone can dare to address in any kind of need in weakness and in sin, for she has understanding for everything and is for everyone the open power of creative goodness. In her, God has impressed his own image. So, yes, Mary knew that Jesus, in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, was the Messiah the Son of God.

Relying upon *Mystery of Mary: Mary Model of the Growth of the Christian Life* by Fr. Marie-Dominique Phillippe O.P.; conversations with Fr. Alain Marie SSJ