

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord *Luke 1.26-38*

Then Mary said, 'I and the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me be with me' +

As Christians – our relationship with God means that we naturally want to please him. We want to please God; we want to help God's kingdom to come; we want to do good; we want live lives of love and service.

Now this is all good and proper - but if we really want to meet God, then we shouldn't be starting from this point. We shouldn't be announcing (perhaps sometimes quite smugly) what we are going to do for God. Because it is God who takes the initiative and chooses what should be done.

We see a perfect picture of God's initiative and the human response in the story of the Annunciation. God sends the angel to Mary: the greeting is loving and respectful; Mary is praised.

“Rejoice, so highly favoured one! The Lord is with you”

And that is deeply disturbing for Mary.

Any encounter with the living God is disturbing, because God does not come to plump up the pillows behind our head and make us more comfortable where we are. Rather God comes to invite, to challenge, to show us more love and truth than we thought we could cope with. God can be terrifying, not because we are awful people and he is a fierce judge, but simply because he is infinite and has purposes for us which are beyond anything we can begin to imagine.

Some people use religion as a way of limiting God and keeping themselves comfortable.

But God is not a comfortable cushion, but a challenge to comfortable and introspective lives. Whoever God encounters; he demands by the intensity of his beauty - so even the Virgin Mary was deeply disturbed by his coming in the awesome person of the archangel.

But God doesn't frighten us the way a bully does, to make us cringe. He comes with the message: *Do not be afraid* - God is on your side, you have a destiny to fulfil.

Mary's destiny is simply - and incredibly - that she should become the mother of God.

But this seems to be impossible.

And Mary is not being plain obstinate in her doubt - she is not married. She wants to be faithful to her present calling which doesn't allow her at this point in her life to become a mother.

There is a genuine difficulty.

Because whenever God calls us, we are likely to find a difficulty in what he asks us: not just an inconvenience, but a seeming impossibility. How can *any* of us fulfil our calling to bring Christ into the world? The angel's response is to remind Mary that God's power is going to be at work.

What seems impossible to us is not impossible to God.

Mary can be both a virgin and a mother. "For nothing will be impossible for God"

Often, we have a limited vision, an *either-or* vision. Either I can be gentle, or I can be strong; either I can be truthful, or I can be loving, but surely not both? But God, who is both gentleness and strength, both truth and love, can make the impossible happen.

But God doesn't do it without us.

Though he took the initiative with Mary, though he answered her difficulty, he was still waiting for her response. Mary was ordinary - she was a poor local girl – a poor unmarried teenage girl and her life was turned upside down, changed for ever. All that she may have dreamed of – the life she assumed was awaiting her, vanished, her destiny was to be so very different

And this all changed once she had acknowledged the power of God, and then she was the freest person on earth, with that most marvellous of freedoms which is the freedom to say yes to God, to bring God into the world, to build a house for the God who first built us a house.

We want to do good things for God and Mary's example shows us the way. All we must do is to first acknowledge that God must do good things for us, then we will be given the power to do him good. Amen

Fr Robert