



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Annunciation of the Lord

Be it unto me according to thy Word

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10, Ps 39, Hebrews 10: 4-10, Luke 1: 26-38

Almost forty years ago now, as a young Anglican, I found myself wending my way up the garden path of a small country vicarage to talk to an elderly clergyman about thinking that I had a calling to serve God. He was the vocations director of the diocese.

He was a rather dry academic soul marooned in an obscure pastoral ministry and I was a bright eyed bushy tailed evangelical keen to get out there and tell people about Jesus. I do not think we were really each other's cup of tea.

He was clearly not impressed and was certainly not encouraging. He found enthusiasm unseemly in a prospective Anglican clergyman. He loaded me with a fierce reading list and sent me off to think and pray some more.

For both things, in retrospect, I have been very grateful.

His undisguised attempts to put me off taught me that, if something really is God's will and you stick to it, then God delivers. (When I

returned a year later he had been replaced by a lovely and rigorous director with whom I remained friends until his death three years ago).

But on the book list, among many others, but ringed as vital reading, was a slim but terrifically challenging volume by an eighteenth century French Jesuit called Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade. It was entitled, 'Self Abandonment to Divine Providence'.

It very nearly put me off. My ego had to come off centre stage. My ideas about how I could, with my marvellous talents and energy help God out were put in their place, the spiritual waste bin, and replaced by my need for absolute surrender to His will and love and mercy before anything could be achieved that would be truly of any eternal consequence.

I need hardly add that these things remain a daily challenge and it is why we pursue the disciplines to bring us back to the reality of the centrality of God and the proper place of self.

Today is, of course, the day above all days when we see the vision of de Caussade perfectly fulfilled in an human being. In the Annunciation, Our Lady is presented with the greatest challenge in the history of Man, to offer herself so utterly and unreservedly to God, in the purity of her body and soul, that the Son of God may take flesh in her and begin the process of the redemption of the human race.

All time and eternity hangs on that moment in the kitchen at Nazareth.

The Immaculately prepared Madonna is to answer, as the New Eve, the new sinless creation of God, whether she will bear the Salvator Mundi, the Saviour of the World.

De Caussade writes this:

'A saintly soul is a soul freely submissive, with the help of grace, to the divine will. All that follows on this free consent is the work of God, and not of man.'

Where do we see this more powerfully and fruitfully displayed than in Our Lady?

But note, this submission is not the modern carelessness, 'WHATEVER', just do it. It is rather a deliberate act of the will, of the heart and mind to be in active and loving collaboration with the will of God.

Mary declares herself, in the face of this extraordinary challenge, to be, literally, *'the slave girl of the Lord'* – God's girl, servant of the Almighty. She offers everything wholeheartedly, unreservedly. *'Be it unto me according to thy Word'*.

This Word is the very Word that has brought the cosmos into being and will, in the Christ child, shortly come to tabernacle in her womb.

Mary is willing to offer her very life to the deepest things of God, to the One who made her, redeemed her and has now called her out of obscurity to the centre stage of history. It is truly an awesome call and truly an awesome response.

No wonder we love Our Lady so much. No wonder we value her prayers.

For us all, in our little local calling, priest and people alike, the challenge is different only in degree. It is no different in principle.

If we, like Mary, are truly prepared to bring Christ to the world in our generation, then the path of Self Abandonment to Divine Providence remains the only way.

'Not my will but thy will be done, Lord'

We say it several times a day, *'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', 'Be it unto me according to thy Word.'*

If we are serious about our mission and ministry, if we are truly 'up' for the adventure of salvation, it begins here beside Mary, giving ourselves utterly, by the help of grace, to the divine will – bearing the Saviour into the world for its salvation.

Our Lady, Mother of Christ, pray for us.

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