

Homily on Annunciation, December 21, 2014
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In response to the Angel's statement that Mary would conceive and bear a Son, Our Blessed Mother asks what seems to some of us, a really strange question, she asks:

How can this be since I have no relations with a man?

Why would Mary say this when she was already betrothed to Joseph, which was essentially a marriage, and clearly knew that with marriage come children. Her response seems inconsistent with a woman who expected to have relations with her spouse. A betrothed woman would not ask "how" she would conceive, but "when" she would conceive.

You see, it was not unusual at the time of Christ that some Jewish men and women would choose to stay consecrated virgins. The great archaeological discoveries of the Qumran Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed that consecrated virginity, before and even after marriage, was practiced at that time. If Mary, prior to her betrothal, had chosen to remain a virgin for life, then her response "How can this be since I have no relations with a man" is consistent. And, being a truthful woman, she would have told Joseph that before they were betrothed. And, since Joseph decided to marry her regardless, we might also conclude that Joseph made a vow of virginity as well. It makes sense, doesn't it, when viewed through the LENS of their time. It also makes sense because some of the saints, especially Saint Augustine, believed that Mary's response to the angel indicated that she was a consecrated virgin, although the Church has not formally affirmed Augustine's theory.

So, God came to Mary (this virgin) through His angelic ambassador, Gabriel, and proposed to her; He didn't impose. Mary was free to decide to accept God's proposal, or to reject it. And what did she do? She accepted. My simple words do not do justice to the reality of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary. Saint Maximilian Kolbe sees the union between Mary and the Holy Spirit being even MORE intimate than that of spouses in marriage:

Among creatures made in God's image, the union brought about by married love is the most intimate of all. In a much more precise, more interior, more essential

manner, the Holy Spirit lives in the soul of the Immaculata, in the depths of her very being.

The angel did not say: Hail, partially full of grace! He said, "Full of grace"--Full of the presence of God. Her soul, her spirit and her body were full of God's presence beyond that of any human being. Mary's acceptance of the Spirit's proposal to fully possess her, to become totally one with her in a manner far exceeding the concept of two in one flesh, made her the living presence of the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, there are some today who attempt to minimize Mary's role in our salvation. They say that God essentially closed His eyes and chose a woman from amongst many women—it is like He put his hand over His eyes and randomly pointed until He stopped and selected just a woman — "You are the one I will choose."

That really is a ridiculous notion and such a statement brings to mind a scene from Kung Fu Panda. How many of you have seen Kung Fu Panda? In the movie Kung Fu Panda, Po, a Panda develops into the Dragon Warrior and toward the end he encounters the vengeful and treacherous snow leopard Tai Lung, who has travelled far to confront and defeat the Dragon Warrior, so that he can assume the Dragon Warrior's title. Tai Lung says to Po, "Well, you are nothing but a big, fat Panda." And Po responds: "I am not "A" big fat Panda; I am "THE" big fat Panda."

Well, I can't imagine Mary ever saying something like that, I don't mean she would call herself a big fat panda, but what I mean is that she would never glorify herself, because she is most humble, and she would never exalt herself to her spiritual children, but there is one person, SATAN, who, if he challenged her with "well, you're nothing but A woman amongst many women", she would reply, I am not just A woman, I am by God's grace, THE woman. I am the woman from Genesis, prophesized to crush the head of the serpent. The woman empowered by God to destroy you, SATAN. I am the Woman in the Book of Revelation, the woman clothed with the sun, with the Moon under my feet and on my head a crown of twelve stars. That is who she is. That is OUR Virgin Mother! No one messes with The Woman or her spiritual children.

Saint Joseph's reaction to Mary's pregnancy also reinforces our belief in her perpetual virginity. The Scripture says he was a just man and once he learned of her pregnancy, he wished to separate from her quietly, Joseph did not want to expose her to the Law, but later, after God revealed to him that Mary had conceived the Savior of the world, the Scripture says, he took his wife, Mary, into his home.

So, I ask you men, how would you act in this situation? Think about it. You are a young man, living in accordance with God's love; you are interested in this wonderful, pure, young woman. You know her to be honest and holy—a keeper of God's law and God's love.

And, suddenly you find out that God, the creator of all things, the almighty, the master of all that is living, has chosen her for His spouse, and has conceived within her, His Son. You know that you have been chosen to be the earthly protector of the Holy Spirit's spouse and the Son of God. Imagine the awe and the respect Joseph would feel towards Mary!

And since we are doing movies today, I think a good representation of this concept of "respect" is depicted very clearly in the movie *Song of Bernadette* to include the historical accounts of the apparitions.

How many of you have seen the movie? Well, for those of you who have not seen it, the *Song of Bernadette* is a true story about Our Blessed Mother appearing to Saint Bernadette in the year 1858—four years after the Pope solemnly proclaimed that Mary was the Immaculate Conception—that Mary was conceived immaculate within her mother—conceived free from Original Sin—what the Church calls a singular privilege of grace. In the movie, a devout, young man named Antoin shows interest in courting Bernadette. During one of the apparitions, Bernadette goes into ecstasy and Antoin is there to witness it. This experience greatly moves him—it cuts deeply to his soul. Following this experience, Antoin tells his mother:

Mam'ma, as long as I live I'll never see anything more beautiful than the face of that girl as she lay there at Massabeille; one ought to not even touch a being like that.

Well, how much more so, did Joseph regard Mary, the spouse of Almighty God, whose spiritual brilliance leaves all other brilliance, pale and whose beauty leaves all other beauty, plain?

Joseph knew that Mary's fiat, her acceptance, would affect all humanity. So, her "fiat", "Let it be done to me as you say" was the most profound, most far reaching, most important statement ever made by a human being. Saint Bernard recognized the significance of her fiat at the Annunciation and its effect on all humanity:

You have heard, O Virgin that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us. The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent...Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

That comfort, that ransom, that freedom, that salvation, came to us through her. So, we honor her as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit honor her. We don't worship her, but we honor her, especially as her Son honors her-perfectly-because she is The Woman. Please bow your heads as we conclude with a prayer:

Loving Mother of the Redeemer, Gate of Heaven, Star of the Sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again. To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator, yet remained a virgin after as before. You, who received Gabriel's joyful greeting, have pity on us poor sinners.

I wish you all Mary's Christmas