

## A Reflection on the Angelus Prayer

In this reflection on the Angelus Prayer I would like to share some thoughts with you on this simple and scripturally rooted prayer. My sole purpose in writing this reflection is to encourage the reader to recite and ponder this beautiful scriptural prayer which contains in itself in a summary form some of the essential truths of our faith. The Angelus is a "priceless pearl" which will help us to recall quickly how much God our Father loves us and how he manifested that love for us in human form in his Son Jesus who is at the centre of all creation and through whom nothing that has existence can do without.

Let us look at the first verse of the Angelus. "The Angel of the Lord declared the good news unto Mary. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit." As we look at this first verse we see the Angel Gabriele announces the good news to Mary. In Luke's Gospel the Angel Gabriele is sent by God to a specific place in Nazareth in Galilee, to a virgin betrothed to Joseph of the House of David. The angel greets Mary, "Hail, most favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly disturbed at the Angel's greeting and presence. Mary did not know that the angel was to visit her. He tells her, "Do not be afraid" he re-assures her that he has come to bring her good news. Gabriele announces the good news and he holds his breath so to speak as Mary ponders over the news and invitation.

On reflection when Gabriele announces, 1) that Mary is the most favoured and 2) that she had been chosen to bear the Son of the Living God, I often revisit the events, those of Genesis 2-3ff, that have brought us to this greater event this prayer calls to mind. The Angel Gabriele firstly greets Mary, "Hail, most favoured, the Lord is with you." What a salute to give to Mary a young Jewish woman completely unknown. "Hail, most favoured one..." Gabriele remind us that Mary was herself prepared and chosen by the Most Blessed Trinity in heaven before all creation came to be. Now through this greeting Gabriele salutes she who is to become the Mother of the Son of God. She is the most "blessed of all women". This greeting and presence of Gabriele surprises Mary, she could not have known beforehand that she was to be the chosen one to help fulfil at least one of the prophecies in Isaiah about the "...virgin shall bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel."

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, writes about the Creed in which we profess that Jesus is both God and Man, and he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary... "When we talk of the Living God it means: This God shows himself to us; he looks from eternity into time and puts himself into (a more personal-intimate-presence) and relationship with us...the veil behind which God is secluded are swept aside and the mystery touches us directly. The distant God becomes our God, becomes Emmanuel, God with us" (p.12 God is near Us)

As I revisit Genesis 3:15ff, I see in the Promise of the Lord God something else, it doesn't appear immediately but it is there. This is what I see that the Lord God created Adam and Eve, so that in creation there is a beginning and then a time and mission that are assigned to Adam and Eve... the

mission is carried out in their daily lives. As creatures of God they are not perfect and are liable to make mistakes. The Holy Trinity already know this yet, their loving desire to share of themselves is greater than every - thing else, that deepest desire, the deepest gift of freedom to give for the sake of the other that their "joy may be complete" is something that is ongoing. There is something else that I see that God would eventually want Adam and Eve and all creation to see that life can be lived in total obedience, freedom and love by someone like themselves but free from sin, this would encourage all creation to want to imitate this person Jesus Christ.

This means that God the Father would choose a specific time and place when his Son the Word would come into the world. For this to happen it would mean that someone would have to be chosen to bear him. Only someone who is free from all stain of sin and pride would be invited to take part in this special mission. This woman would be blessed above all others and be given all the graces necessary to make her decision as a great act of faith, in her heart then enfleshed in her own body by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was this woman full of grace and beauty from whom the Light from Light, True God from True God would proceed into our world...

Sr. Ilia Delio SFO, in her book the "Humility of God" writes, "...Instead, several thousand years later, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to save fallen humankind from sin and death." (p.49) Keeping in mind that we humans are creatures and are liable to make some horrendous mistakes and choices it would be perilous to think that God only sent Jesus to save us only from sin. Delio writes, "The whole point of Jesus according to the story (Genesis, 2-3ff) is based on the wrong choices of finite human beings." (p.49) Further on she writes, "The Franciscan scholar Bill Short aptly states, "Why build a Taj Majal to cover a pothole?" Indeed, why would so great an event as the Incarnation, the Word becomes flesh, occur only *after* humans sinned? Why would so great and glorious an event happen because of a *defect* in humanity?"

"In the Franciscan view the Incarnation occurs because of a positive-love-not-a negative sin. This is an important point because the way we understand the Incarnation shapes our lives as Christians in the world. If love "*is*" the reason for the Incarnation then it is also the reason for God's humility because, as we see Francis, God's love is a humble love. It is a love that goes to of itself toward the other for the sake of the other." (The Humility of God, pp.50-51)

All of this is contained in the good news given to Mary. She alone can claim to the title of: Most blessed of all women and mother of the Son of God." It was Mary who completely cooperated with the Holy Spirit through the gifts of grace that she "conceived" the eternal Word of the Father and gave him through her humanity to all of creation, so that he became "flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone." When Jesus is conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus begins the act of restoration in himself the "image and likeness" in which we were made but marred through sin. He completes this image and likeness" in the act of the Resurrection when he overcomes sin and death. Through Jesus' humanity we regain our intimate relationship with the Father and are raised through baptism to a higher place and have inherited a share in Christ's own divine life.

Again we see the Lord God bending down towards picking us and holding near his check. This promise of the Lord God does not exclude humanity. No! He gives the descendants of Adam and Eve an opportunity to continue in fidelity and faith in his messengers the prophets who also announce his words to them. The promise has two parts to it. Firstly, he uses the words like "enmity between you and the woman." The word 'enmity' is used here to signify that the 'offspring will come to do

battle with the evil one. Secondly, the words 'offspring and woman' tell us that a child will be born to this woman and 'He will strike at your head...while you strike at his heel.' What great good news that is contained in this promise. The promise will be carried out by a male child. Perhaps this promise gave Adam and Eve a hope that a member their own kin would do battle for them and eventually win back all that they had lost. And they were not wrong in thinking that good news.

Often the Prophets would use language to convey the message of the Lord God which was at times extremely harsh other times filled with compassion and the promise of forgiveness and hope. One common expression that was used by the Prophets was, "In the days to come the Lord God..." would do something or announce a special message to give them strength and hope... Each prophecy given them by the Lord God was a new development of the promise of a redeemer/Messiah and that this coming was imminent. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read a description of such a prophecy "A prophet like me will the Lord your God raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him shall you listen..." (Deut. 15-16) And later we read in Jeremiah, "Behold the days are coming say the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right." (23:5) In the Prophet Isaiah very early in his prophecies we read "...then he said listen O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel..." (7:14)

Those days are coming yes indeed they have arrived as the Angel Gabriele announced the good news unto Mary. To her alone was given the singular privilege to be told "you have won God's favour and that "you will conceive and bear a child...the Most High will overshadow you, the child will be holy..." What great news to have announced to you. What must Mary have felt like, what emotions must have run through her mind that she was that virgin and mother that the Prophets had spoken about?

I leave you with a wonderful consequence of Mary's reception of the Angel's message. And this message was taken up by our holy father St. Francis whose love for Jesus and Mary could barely be contained. "Although the Son brings us to the discovery of the Father, the Son cannot be known in his deepest being except by the Spirit who enables one to "see" the Father in the Son. It is the Spirit, Francis says that unites us to Christ by making us a spouse of Christ: "We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit...union with Christ in the Spirit leads us to the Father..." (Ilia Delio SFO, "Crucified Love" p.17 Let us pray to our Mother that she will continue to pray for us now and the hour of our death to her Son Jesus.