

Homily
Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God
January 1, 2023

Thirty-two years, one month and four days ago, I proposed to my now wife. I got down on one knee, and not in a smooth way, I held her hand in my sweaty palm, and asked the question, “Will you marry me?” That’s not how it sounded in my head, it was more like a muffled, under water, slow motion garble. She must have heard me and understood. Her initial response was like a deer in headlights, for a few unnerving seconds for me. Her eyes grew big as if she was stunned from the impact of the question. Then she said, “Yes, yes, yes,” in rapid order, as if not to allow the question to expire.

I did not know if she would say yes. I was pretty sure, but not positive. She was probably hoping that I would someday ask that question, but she was not at that moment expecting it. It was a very memorable moment in our lives that neither of us will ever forget.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to tell her what was about to happen, “...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.” Gabriel didn’t ask Mary; Gabriel knew how she would respond because, well, God knows everything. Mary said, “May it be done to me according to your word.” We know this as Mary’s Fiat, which in Latin literally means, “Let it be done.”

This brings up the often-asked question, “Did Mary have Free Will?” If God knew Mary would consent, then how did she give her consent freely?

To answer this, we must go back to the beginning of time, the moment when God created the physical universe. God clapped His hands ~clap~ and the universe came into being and is still held in His loving hands. He knows all, sees all, loves all. He knows you and me, in minute detail, from our beginning to right now and on. We, because of His love, must have Free Will or our existence would not have been created in God’s love. Without Free Will, we could not freely love God, we could not freely love each other. Our freedom to say, “No,” is what allows us to freely love God and each other.

Therefore, Mary had free will when she said, “Yes,” to God. And we have that same freedom to say, “Yes,” to God, every day, every moment. The difference is that Mary said, “Yes,” to God from the moment she could think on her own. She made a decision to say, “Yes,” in everything she did and said. She was saying yes to God long before Gabriel came to her in a town of Galilee called Nazareth. And God knew Mary would say, “Yes,” because God knows everything. This is why God chose Mary to be the Mother of His Son.

Jesus, out of obedience to His Father, became one of us in all ways but sin. He chose Mary to be His mother because she said, “Yes.” Jesus, fully human by His birth of the woman, and fully divine as the Second Person of the Trinity, is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. This is why we can confidently call the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, the Solemnity we celebrate today. All because of God’s Love and Mary’s “Yes.”

How often do we say, “Yes,” to God. Because of our Free Will, we can say, “No,” and we often do. Adam and Eve said, “No,” to God when they took the fruit from the forbidden tree. And, thanks to Adam and Eve, we have inherited that tainted nature in need of repair, that inclination to say, “No,” even when we know better. God loves us anyway. He can’t help it. It’s His nature because God is Love.

How do we say, “Yes,” to God when it is so much easier to say, “No?” We can start by recognizing those things we do and say or don’t do and don’t say that go against God’s Will. We align our Free Will with God’s Will.

We take time to learn how to recognize those evil things and replace them with good things. In all we do, in all we say, we are trying to satisfy a desire. God wants us to satisfy our desires. He gave us our desires. He gave us gifts and the desire to develop those gifts and share them. This is how we love God and love one another. It is when we focus on ourselves and use our gifts to satisfy our own disordered desires that we realize we aren’t truly satisfied.

We discard our vices and replace them with virtues.

It is so easy for me to stand here and say, “Do good, avoid evil.” That’s a lot easier said than done. That is why I so often say a simple prayer, “Jesus, I trust in you.” He is our Advocate, Who will always look out for us and help us if only we ask.

When we find ourselves going down the wrong path toward a disordered desire, Jesus gives us tools to get us back on the right path. We have the Sacrament of the Eucharist to strengthen us and the Sacrament of Reconciliation to heal us and return us to God’s grace. We have prayer to help us focus. We have Mary and all the Angels and Saints to intercede for us. The Church offers us so much support, as you already know. We just have to say, “Yes.” Pray for ways to replace vice with virtue. Pray for the strength to say, “Yes,” as Mary said, “Yes.”