

MARY'S AMEN

Mary uttered her yes cheerfully. The word Mary used to express her consent doesn't just express a simple resigned acceptance but a living desire. It's as if she were saying, I, too, desire with all my being what God desires; let his wish be fulfilled quickly.

If we go back to the exact word Mary used, it must really have been the word "amen." A Hebrew word which acknowledges what has been said as being firm, stable, valid, and binding. Its exact translation when it is in answer to God's word is, "It is so, may it be so." It indicates both faith and obedience; it acknowledges that what God says is true and submits to it. It is saying yes to God. This is how Jesus himself used it: "Yea, Amen, Father, for such was thy gracious will" (Matt 11:26).

What is true of Mary's faith is true of each believer. Grace and faith are the two pillars of salvation. God gives us the grace to make our heartfelt profession of faith. St Paul says "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8 ff.). Also Mary's act of faith was prompted by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Historically, the Church has focussed on *objective* faith - the confession of the right faith and this has often prevailed over believing with the heart (*subjective* faith). "Believing" principally meant adhering to the belief of the Church. However, a simply objective and dogmatic faith is not enough if it fails to lead to an intimate personal contact with God. It can easily become a dead faith, belief through the institution, which fails as soon as there is a crisis between one's faith and one's personal relation with the institution of the Church. It is necessary, therefore, to believe personally.

But our faith cannot be totally subjective: it is easy to reduce God to our own measure by forming our own idea of God, based on our own personal interpretation of the Bible or on the interpretation of our own narrow circle, and then adhere to this with all our strength, even fanatically, without realizing that we believe more in ourselves than in God. This is what has sadly happened in many parts of the Protestant church.

Mary shows us the perfect balance: her faith was both subjective and objective: deeply personal and heartfelt, yet she believed in the God of her people, who had revealed himself to Abraham and his descendants. So too, our belief must be in communion with the Church, but personally. The dogmatic faith of the Church allows us to know and embrace an immensely greater God than the God of our own limited experience. In uniting ourselves to the faith of the Church, we are united with the faith of the apostles, the martyrs, the Doctors of the Church, the saints. That united faith makes the very foundations of the reign of darkness tremble.

What should we do then? The answer is simple: after praying, so that our prayer does not remain superficial, say to God, using the very words Mary used: Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word! I am saying amen, yes, my God, to your whole plan. I give you myself!

But our prayer should not be with resignation "If it cannot be avoided, well then, let your will be done!" Mary teaches us to say it in a different way. Knowing that God's will is infinitely more beautiful and richer in promises than any of our own plans, and knowing that God is infinite love and has "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (see Jer 29:11), let us say, full of desire and almost impatiently, as Mary did: Let your will of love and peace be fulfilled in me, O God!

Paraphrased and condensed from "BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED!" Mary in the Annunciation. First Advent Sermon 2019 by P. Raniero Cantalamessa ofmcap.

<https://www-vn.azureedge.net/en/vatican-city/news/2019-12/raniero-cantalamessa-first-advent-sermon-2019-mary.html>