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## **\*\*\*\*\*PALM SUNDAY\*\*\*\*\***

**ON THE MEND:** Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Theodosius [OCA], Archbishop Jovan, Bishop Robert, Father George & Pani Lillian Hnatko, Father John Harvey, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Archpriest Dionysi Vitali, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Father Paisius McGrath, Father Michael Smolynec, Father Bazyl Zawierucha, Father Lawrence & Matushka Sophia Daniels, Father John Harrold [Saint Sylvester], Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Stella Peanoske, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Gary & Linda Mechtly, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, George Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Esther Holupka, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Julie Eiler, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie— young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—21-year-old with cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael

Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciow, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Carl & Margaret Reed, Lydia Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia, John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Donald Griffey, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Stroz [child with cerebral palsy], Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Richard Dunst, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Chris, David Hiles, Karen Johnson, Jennifer, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Gail, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Fred DeNorscia, Sandi Anderson, ina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Ella Campbell, Tom Hyatt, Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Barbara McDougall, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Nancy Heinbaugh, Mira Filipović, Lynn, Jacqueline, Sharon, Zan Cheng, Jeff Jones, Kristy, Elaine Ellenberger, Brandon, Anna Tranchine, Demetra, Blase Urban, Catherine Hogel & children, Jennifer & Dylan, Ron Schwartz, Lydia Wilson, Flora Tomlin, Stella Rossi, Howell Swarm, Jane Bielewicz Allred, Manny "Lazarus" Lopez, Glenn & Lucas Burlack, Katie Elizabeth, Mileva, & Michael, Deirdré Straughan, Terri Paluh, Lori & Steve Lucier, Kyranna Cherpas, Pastor Bruce Nordeen, Millie Koss Good, Heather Ried, Carla Perry, Linda Elliot, Dennis McDaniel, Luke Tinsley, Brent, Tricia, Katherine Gorman, Pamela Jaquette, Michael Pawlyshyn, Sherri Walewski, Marika Zeliszczuk, Donna Davis, Jackie Crimbchin, Marta Charron, Mary [Corba], Stella McKeag, Margie Sekelsky, Gary Howell, Fran Fulton, Gina Catanese, Bill Vizza, Jamie Swarm, Kevin Allen (from Ancient Faith Radio), Kathy Flaherty, Tori Reade-Henry's niece, Derick-Glen Burlack's neighbor, Michael, Nichole & Christopher, Ben Douglas, Dianne Donahue, Zachary, Natasha, Noah Willard, Jodi Hanczar, Gregory Cervo, Lisa Bruce, Martha Nezolyk, Kathy Cvetkovich, Frances Gebet, Sheryl Smith Haraczy, Judy, Will, Emma, Ginny, Ye-Jin, Maria, John & JoAnn, Jim & Kitty, Bill Baronie, Phil Bouse, Ralph & Beverly Stoker, Noah Willard, Nikola, Natalie, Nikola, & Nevenka Jovonovich, Julia Collier, Amy Kemerer, Thomas Smith, Tracy Slaugenhaupt, Louis & Teresa Berceli, Tom

Nolan, Noble Wilshaw, Silvia Martin, Sarah Dorning, Evelyn Burlack, Dena & George, Georgia, Lawanda [Evelyn's niece], Maureen Sams, and Ian Brick. ARNOLD: Homer Paul Kline. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

**PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!**

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY to our April babies: Robert Chicka on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Reader Alexander Popichak on the 15<sup>th</sup>, Matthew Popichak on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and Kim Shirley on the 18<sup>th</sup>. May God grant them all Many Happy, Healthy, Prosperous, and Blessed Years! M'nohaya Lita! God Bless them all!**

**REMINDER FOR GREAT LENT: This year we are asking everyone to pray for those who protect the least amongst us: police officers, firefighters, medical professionals, EMS folks, and especially the monastics—nuns and monks who pray for all of us constantly. Please remember Mother Alexandra and the sisterhood in Guatemala, and all members of our parish. God Bless you all!**

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men and women—and bring them all home safely!

**REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!**

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please ask Father Bob.

**AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.**

**SCHEDULE OF SERVICES**

<b>SUNDAY, APRIL 01</b>	<b>OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
<b>6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; PALM SUNDAY; ENTRANCE OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM; MARTYRS CHRYSANTHUS &amp; DARIA &amp; THOSE WITH THEM AT ROME-CLAUDIUS, HILARIA, JASON, MAURUS, DIODORUS-PRESBYTER &amp; MARIANUS-DEACON; MARTYR PANCHARIUS AT NICOMEDIA</b>		
Philippians 4:4-9 John 12:1-19		
<b>WEDNESDAY, APRIL 04</b>	<b>HOLY UNCTION</b>	<b>6:30 PM</b>
<b>THURSDAY, APRIL 05</b>	<b>12 PASSION GOSPELS</b>	<b>6:30 PM</b>
<b>FRIDAY, APRIL 06</b>	<b>PLASCHENYTSIA &amp; BURIAL PROCESSION</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>
<b>SUNDAY, APRIL 08</b>	<b>PASCHAL DIVINE LITURGY</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
<b>BLESSING OF PASCHAL BASKETS DOWNSTAIRS AFTER LITURGY</b>		
Acts 1:12-17, 21-25 John 20:19-25		
<b>SUNDAY, APRIL 15</b>	<b>OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
<b>ANTIPASCHA; 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF PASCHA; SAINT THOMAS SUNDAY; VENERABLE TITUS THE WONDERWORKER; MARTYRS AMPHIANUS &amp; EDESIUS OF LYCIA; MARTYR POLYCARP OF ALEXANDRIA</b>		
Tone 1 Acts 5:12-20 John 20:19-31		

## **BULLETIN INSERT FOR 01 APRIL 2018**

**6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; PALM SUNDAY; ENTRANCE OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM; MARTYRS CHRYSANTHUS & DARIA & THOSE WITH THEM AT ROME-CLAUDIUS, HILARIA, JASON, MAURUS, DIODORUS-PRESBYTER & MARIANUS-DEACON; MARTYR PANCHARIUS AT NICOMEDIA**

### **The First Antiphon \*2 (Psalm 116)**

I love the Lord because He has heard the voice of my supplication.

**Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.**

Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live.

**Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.**

The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of hell laid hold on me.

**Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.**

I suffered distress and anguish; then I called upon the name of the Lord.

**Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.**

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

**Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.**

**The Second Antiphon '2 (Psalm 116)**

I kept my faith even when I said: "I am greatly afflicted!"

**O Son of God who sat upon the foal, save us who sing to Thee :  
Alleluia!**

What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He has given me?

**O Son of God who sat upon the foal, save us who sing to Thee :  
Alleluia!**

I will receive the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

**O Son of God who sat upon the foal, save us who sing to Thee :  
Alleluia!**

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.

**O Son of God who sat upon the foal, save us who sing to Thee:  
Alleluia!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

**Only-begotten Son and immortal Word of God, Who for our salvation didst will to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, Who without change didst become man and wast crucified, Who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit: O Christ our God, trampling down death by death, save us!**

**The Third Antiphon \*1 (Psalm 118)**

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever!

**By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee: O Vanquisher of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

Let the house of Israel say: For He is good, for His mercy endures forever!

**By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee: O Vanquisher of**

**Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

Let the house of Aaron say : For He is good, for His mercy endures forever!

**By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee: O Vanquisher of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

Let all those who fear the Lord say: For He is good, for His mercy endures forever!

**By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee: O Vanquisher of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

### **The Introit of the Little Entrance**

Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord! God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!

**By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee: O Vanquisher of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **Another Troparion\*4**

When we were buried with Thee in Baptism, O Christ God, we were made worthy of eternal life by Thy Resurrection! Now we praise Thee and sing: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### **Kontakion \*6**

Sitting on Thy throne in heaven, carried on a foal on earth, O Christ God! Accept the praise of angels and the songs of children, who sing: Blessed is He that comes to recall Adam!

### **Prokeimenon \*4 (Psalm 118)**

Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!

**Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!**

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever!

**Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!**

Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!

**God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!**

### **Alleluia Verses \*1 (Psalm 98)**

O sing to the Lord a new song, for the Lord has done marvelous things!  
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God!

### **The Hymn to the Theotokos (Replaces "It is Truly Meet")**

**God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us! Celebrate the feast and come with gladness! Let us magnify Christ with palms and branches, singing: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!**

### **Communion Hymn (Psalm 118)**

Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us!

### **STRUGGLING TO STAY ON THE FAITHFUL PATH**

**Fr Luke Veronis** [via Father George Livanos]

"O Faithless generation. How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?" (Mk 9:19) Think about these disturbingly harsh words from our Lord in the Gospel reading today. "O Faithless generation." Were they words only for His generation 2000 years ago, or do they describe the times we live in?

When we look around at the world every day, think about the craziness of our society, and realize how many people have turned away from God and His ways, what do we think? Many people are even wondering whether we are living in the end times? "O Faithless generation."

What's interesting, though, is that Christ asked this question 2000 years ago. And if we are attentively reading the prescribed Scripture passages during the Lenten season – in the books of Genesis, Proverbs, and Isaiah – we will quickly realize that this "faithless generation" is not something unique to any one time period of history. In the book of Genesis we read about how quickly wickedness spread during the time of Noah, when the whole world was destroyed

by a flood, and then in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, again two cities destroyed for their faithlessness. It seems that from the beginning of time, people used their freedom to turn away from their Creator. In Isaiah, centuries after the stories in Genesis, we hear the prophet warn even the people of Israel, the people of God, how they had forgotten and turned away from God. God's judgment was coming upon them as well as upon their neighbors in Syria, Egypt, Babylonia, and Ethiopia. And then in Proverbs, we read the words of Solomon warning people to avoid the enticing path of evil, and to seek after the road of holy wisdom. This is the backdrop to then Jesus coming centuries later and asking His disciples, "When the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on earth?"

Reading the Bible, and reflecting on the history of God's people in Scripture and throughout Church history, we realize that in every generation we see faithlessness, wickedness, and a general indifference and turning away from God. This is not something new in our own generation, but a description of every generation.

What is maybe more important for us to realize throughout Scripture, however, is how a few people stay faithful, only a remnant of people struggle to follow the ways of God. Imagine during the generation of the Prophet Elijah, he thought he was THE ONLY ONE in all of Israel who remained faithful to God. Elijah wasn't criticizing the people and nations outside of Israel, but he thought even within the chosen people of God, he alone held on to the faith, he alone remained faithful. Of course, God corrected him and let Elijah know he wasn't alone, but the Lord admitted that only a few thousand, out of the entire country, remained faithful to God.

This is why Jesus warned all of us, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Mt 7:13-14)

The journey to faithfully following Christ is definitely NOT easy. And if we are not struggling, consciously wrestling daily to stay faithful, then we probably are NOT on the narrow path that leads to life. Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition of our Church remind us constantly that we must remain VIGILANT, CAREFUL, SOBER, and SINCERE in our struggle to walk with Jesus Christ. Our contemporary Christianity has turned the Christian life into some comfortable, easy stroll through the pastures of self-centered desires and hoped-for prosperity, instead of the actual spiritual battle in which we are toiling and laboring to overcome our egocentric desires and passions and cultivating the virtues that lead us down the narrow path of His kingdom.

This war should be magnified during the Lenten season. And yet, I want to ask all of you a serious question – "Do you feel like you are sincerely struggling to grow in your Christian faith during this season of Lent? What are you actually doing where you are consciously seeking after God? I know some of us may be



fasting during this Holy season, but is our Fast a serious exertion? Are we combining the physical fast with spiritual asceticism?" Please let us ask ourselves right now, "How much time and effort EACH DAY am I making to seek after God? How am I nourishing my faith and striving to grow in my commitment and dedication to Him? Does it feel like an authentic battle? If not, then we are doing something wrong!

Remember, our faith is not simply some knowledge we acquire, but it is a relationship we constantly build. And all of us know that in any relationship, if we don't put in time, and if we don't sensitively care for it, we risk losing it. Think of the human relationships each of us have in our lives. Do relationships stay the same? Are the closest friends we had 30 years ago, 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago, the same as today? Why do some friendships and relationships blossom and grow, while others disappear? In a similar manner, our faith, if not attended to and nourished, will also change – for the better or worse.

Today on the 4th Sunday of Lent, we remember one of the great ascetic fathers – St John of the Ladder. St John was a spiritual giant who served as the abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai during the 7th century. As the spiritual guide of numerous monks, he wrote the spiritual classic *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, one of the greatest books in all Christian history, whose purpose was to help his monks journey up the spiritual ladder that leads into the Kingdom of Heaven. St John clearly understood that even monks, even those who take monastic vows and try to live radical lives for Christ, even such people needed reminders to take care of overcoming their vices and nourishing the virtues that lead us to God! If monks need reminders to struggle in their faith and journey up the ladder of divine ascent, what does that say for the average Christian living in a secular world surrounded by constant temptations that lead us away from God.

Ultimately, we come to Church every Sunday. But are we here every Sunday and even on other days to sincerely worship the Lord? We participate in the Divine Mysteries of Holy Communion and Holy Confession. And yet, how many of us actually go to Confession? We journey through Great Lent with the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. How serious, however, is our daily prayer rule, our physical and spiritual fasting, and our conscious almsgiving? These are all questions we all have to ask ourselves, sincerely and carefully. Self-awareness, not self-deception, is what we strive for in our Christian walk.

O faithless generation? Will the Son of Man really find faith when He comes on earth? This question of our Lord should make us all reflect on our lives, our own journeys, on the growth of our faith, and lead us to ask ourselves, "Are we among the few, the remnant, who authentically and sincerely struggle down the narrow path of faith, or do we fall in with the many who carelessly stroll along the broad path of destruction?" The battle awaits each one of us!

## **HUMBLE OBEDIENCE—NOT A POPULAR NOTION**

### **THE ANNUNCIATION—Fr. Luke Veronis** [via Father George Livanos]

Obedience. Not a very popular notion for many people. How many of us like to obey others? When we're told to do something, or if it is suggested that a certain way is the best way, how many of us accept and agree right away? We Americans have such an independent spirit. We don't like to be told to do anything, especially when it comes to what people say is right and wrong. We've grown up in a hyper-individualistic age, which plays off the age-old temptations of ego and pride, and gives us the attitude: "Don't tell me what to do. I can do whatever I want." This individualistic spirit is not only seen in the millennial generation, but in every generation. Each of us are our own people, with our own opinions, and thus, will follow our own path.

If we are sincere followers of Jesus Christ, however, and if we truly try to place Almighty God at the center of our lives, then we must understand an uncomfortable reality. Our lives are not our own. When we decided to become followers of Christ, we freely chose to give our lives over to God. When we pray daily "Your will be done," this implies placing God's will above all else; to understand and accept His will in our lives, and to try and apply His will over our own. Our minds and hearts need to be open to direction, correction, and guidance from God's Spirit. We all have opinions, and yet, our minds should be open to change, allowing our opinions to be formed by our faith. Holy Scriptures and the teachings of our holy tradition, above all else, should influence and enlighten what we believe and how we choose to live.

And yet, how many of us allow Fox News or the NY Times to fill our minds with its own ideas. We allow Hollywood and the celebrity culture influence our opinions. We fill our minds with what we see on Facebook and Instagram and Snapchat and other social media avenues. Pause and reflect for a moment on what we spend the majority of our time with each day? Do you ever stop and think about what influences our opinions? And how much of that time and influence, can we honestly say, comes from our faith? From the Bible? From the saints and other men and women inspired by God? How, and from what, are our attitudes and worldview formed?

Let's come back to the topic of obedience, and our typical rebellion against it. We don't like to be told what to do! For many, we often don't like to be challenged in our faith to follow a path that is difficult or uncomfortable or inconvenient – whether to fast strictly, to pray daily, to spend 30 minutes a day with God reading Scripture and dwelling in His Presence, or whether it is to live a life of unconditional love, of forgiveness, of sincere repentance, of purity, of chastity, of simple living and generous giving. We don't give serious attention to seeking out God's will and striving to obey Him above all else,

including above our own ego-centric desires and longings! Here lies our great challenge!

Today in the Church [March 25/April 7], we celebrate the feastday of the Annunciation, during which we lift up the greatest model of obedience and deference to God's will. The Virgin Mary was a young maiden when asked to give up all for God, to forgo any egocentric desires and fulfill the will of God. Imagine the Archangel Gabriel coming to us when we were 14 or 16 year old, and asking us to offer our life and future, in a radical and even confusing way, to God. How would we respond?

Mary was a young virgin raised in faith, surrounded by pious parents and other faithful examples. She was a simple, village girl betrothed to Joseph. How shocked she must have been to see an angel, the Archangel Gabriel, appear to her and offer his confusing greeting. "Hail Lady full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women!" What must Mary have thought? Who is this angel? Why does he appear to me? What does this greeting mean? The simple fact of encountering an angel must have frightened her dearly! The angel sees her fear and responds, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest."

Surely utter confusion! Fear. Uncertainty. Crazy. What does all this mean? A virgin giving birth? Impossible. The Son of God being born in a human being? Ridiculous. God choosing someone from the backward village of Nazareth? Improbable. God choosing a young, insignificant virgin and asking her to make a decision that will change the world? Absurd.

Many thoughts must have flown through the mind of young Mary. Yet as she listened to the Archangel explain the power of God and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and how "with God nothing will be impossible," she responds in the classic way which all future generations of history will hold up as the model of faith, an example for all future Christians to follow – "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

Listen carefully to Mary's response, for it sets the greatest example of HUMBLE OBEDIENCE for every future generation, for each one of us, to strive to follow in our own lives.

Behold, I am the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word! Can we all repeat this line together?

How would we live our lives differently if we humbly and sincerely offered this prayer to God each day? How would our opinions and worldview change if we sought to truly become "servants of the Lord" and sincerely strove to live "according to your word!"

As Christians, our lives are NOT our own. When we were baptized, we died to our fallen nature, and given a new life in Jesus Christ. "For as many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ!" As hard as it is to accept, our life is not our own!

Thus, Our Christian life entails an ongoing, spiritual battle, a daily struggle between our EGO, our self-centered desires, and our dedication to following the ways of God. The world around us seductively guides us to follow self-centered desires, worldly pursuits which promise to lead to happiness, yet often leave us empty and disappointed. God asks us to follow the path of self-sacrificial love, of placing God above all else, and sacrificing for others in love and humble service. When we pray "Your will be done," we seek to follow God's mysterious ways.

And this path will radically change our lives. It will lead us on a road that seems crazy and misunderstood by friends and family, and society as a whole, for God's ways are NOT the ways of the world. It takes courage. It takes faith. It takes humble obedience to God's word. All virtues that the Virgin Mary exemplifies, and which she challenges us to follow!

Today on this celebration of the Annunciation, may we follow the example of the young Virgin Mary humble obedience, and offer her words as our own words: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word!"