



Dear Jesus Youth Family,

During this Advent, in the 'Year of Faith', let us take Mary our Blessed Mother at her Annunciation as the model for our reflection and action. She shows us that faith is more than assent, but is also trust, commitment, obedience and submission. Mary trusted in God's promises, was obedient to God's word of invitation in her life, surrendered to the mystery before her and committed herself to be part of God's plan for salvation in Jesus.

At the same time, we can easily romanticize the Gospel scene – Mary is at prayer, an angel appears, and requests her consent to become the vessel of Jesus' entry into the human soil and she responds with a faith-filled "yes". The Scripture also tells us that she was deeply troubled and wondered what the angel's greeting demanded. Certainly the angel's explanation only left her with more questions and concerns. She did say "yes" not because she fully understood what the angel meant or got answers to all the questions that welled up in her mind. She said "yes" in faith and trust. We do Mary a disservice to think she had some infused knowledge that dispelled all her doubts or fears. She was a young woman of extraordinary faith. The "yes" at the Annunciation, we know, was not the first "yes" in her life nor would it be the last.

The really significant 'yeses' in our lives and in our journey of faith also demand a great deal of trust and openness. We cannot know all the implications of them. We respond to the gift of God's call in our lives. We say yes in hope and trust. Like Mary, we say "yes" to something being born in us that must flourish and mature and take a shape we cannot predict. We are called to that depth of faith as we contemplate the story of Annunciation and all the events in the life of Jesus. We are called to trust, obedience, surrender, and commitment through our own lives. We will hear an invitation to share in the work of Jesus, to respond and live in faith.

I am reminded of one of the young priests involved in the Jesus Youth ministry who was recently going through a terrible time of trial in his life. All of a sudden he had received letters containing allegations of all kinds against him, which were reported to the Superiors. He was suspended from his office and responsibility until higher authorities finished investigating the allegations. He went through a time of crisis, doubt and questions. He consulted people who could help and guide him through. Finally peace dawned into his heart when he surrendered to God in trust, obedience, surrender and commitment. It was at this time, he says that he received the courage to face any consequences whatsoever despite his innocence. He was ready to be suspended from his priestly functions until the truth came out one day or even worse for his entire life. Soon the grace of acceptance and forgiveness was given to him. The long investigation finally concluded to prove that the allegations were fabricated for the accuser's own advantage. Today, after having gone through such an experience the priest accounts that it has tremendously increased his faith and trust in the living God – 'Immanuel'- God-with-us. The 'yes' he said to God's invitation has brought new life and enthusiasm in his life and the life of several others.

Such experiences are not uncommon in our own circumstances and contexts of Jesus Youth. It could be in the context of our own families, parish, working place, prayer groups, various teams, etc. The question is how do we respond to them? It is possible to make a fuss about it and create tension and turmoil in the family, parish, working place, prayer group, team, etc. This would in turn damage and break relationships and create scandals. On the other hand, it is possible that in faith and trust in the God who called us, we could see it as a moment of invitation in our life to say "yes" to something being born in us that must grow and mature and take a shape we cannot predict. This does not mean that we remain totally passive in the process. Certainly we have a right to question, clarify and defend ourselves. But it should never be done at the cost of the family, parish, prayer group, team, relationships, etc.

Here are some simple ways to incorporate traditional Advent practices during this Year of Faith:

Reflect on Advent as a time of waiting. Waiting in hope is essential to living our faith meaningfully. The idea of waiting is not popular in our culture of instant gratification, but it creates in us a new kind of self-discipline that helps us to appreciate the present moment and look to the future with peaceful anticipation.

Turn your breathing into a prayer: Take a few deep breaths throughout the day and imagine that God's love is flowing through you to every part of your body. As you exhale, let go of tension, worry and anything else that is not of God.

Long for the Lord: Make it a habit of silently praying, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Unite with Mary: Set aside time once a day to join Our Lady in praying the Canticle of Mary (see Lk 1: 46-55).

Do something nice for someone each day: It might be an encouraging word, a phone call, a note of appreciation or a little act of kindness.

Get rid of grudges: Use Advent as an opportunity to let go of any anger or resentment that you might be holding on to.

Pray for patience: If you find yourself becoming anxious or upset, ask the Lord for the gift of patience. Then make a conscious effort to become a more patient person.

Offer up something painful or difficult in your life. The best way to transform trials and tensions is to turn them into a prayer. Learn to say 'yes' to those mysterious invitations of God in faith.

Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation: Take advantage of the opportunity to cleanse your soul in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

Think about the special gifts and talents God has given you. How are you using these gifts?

*Wish you all a very
fruitful advent
season and a*



*Merry
christmas!*

Fr. Bitaju Puthenpurackal, O.S.S.T.

