

Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Wednesday, December 8th

Happy Feast to all near and far. To paraphrase another ritual, “what makes this day different from any other December 8th?” Simply, because this day is like no other that has ever been, and neither are we.

The letter to the Ephesians as well as the Gospel reminds us, as Julianna Casey once said, “There is something about a call.” In general, we understand that our life has hinged on the perception of a call.

For some of us, a call came in youth, much like Mary’s, but maybe was not acted on immediately. However, it *persists* despite many conflicting or distracting experiences. Others are in their chosen careers and then feel that there is something *more*. That opens a search that may lead in a quite unexpected direction. No matter when or how, the “call” clamors to be heard.

We have seen many depictions of Mary’s *call* in the event named the “Annunciation.” We imagine it is so unique. Yes and no. Yes, in that each call is for that unique person in their unique circumstances, but no, in its possible effects. Something new, something profound is offered and awaits a response. It is not usually simple or easy.

Let’s ponder the wood engraving that the Quaker artist Fritz Eichenberg, did for Dorothy Day’s newspaper, The Catholic Worker. I hope you have a copy with you or can see it. I know it is dark, but it was my inspiration for today, so we will focus on the points of light that I will point out in this Annunciation. The basics are there:

First, Mary who looks serenely pondering,
The angel – looks to be to be whispering into Mary’s ear,
“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid.”

The Holy Spirit who “will come upon you” seems to be already moving away with rays streaming back toward her; and notably Mary is already clearly pregnant, “the power of the most High will overshadow you.”; and then, we see a winding path to the hill of the cross in the background, “you will name him Jesus” for he will save the people.

Finally, a mystical flower is in the lower right corner, perhaps the “Lily of Israel” is finally coming into bloom. Eichenberg elicits the whole plan of Incarnation and redemption as *one*. // Do take some time to ponder and appreciate this artwork more fully.

One more feature. The Title of the work is, “The Long Loneliness”. Why that title? What does that evoke in you?

For Mary, the reality of the call was staggering and even dangerous. Who could begin to understand her experience: the depth of the message and the intensity of being caught up in profound mystery? And she carried it for her lifetime.

Anyone who has been asked to “explain” their call, like explaining love, know it is impossible. How do you explain,” I just know?”
Or ... “I heard it in my spirit and my heart said ‘Yes.’”

I remember that discomfort when I told friends and family that I was going to Monroe to become an IHM. The confused look and the question “why?” was always a *tough* moment, and a lonely one. I gave some superficial answers because no matter what I said they wouldn’t get it anyway. And, neither did I. The inner life is just so often unintelligible within “practical life.” It can be very lonely when our future is placed, with deepest trust, into mystery.

We need to remember, that we *too* are hailed, as Beloved “full of grace.”

We *too* have a unique place in the kingdom for *our* unique offerings.

We *too* hear the whisper in our ear,

“You have found favor with God... Do not be afraid.”

Each of our lives has been directed by a call, and like Mary, every yes to God’s call is an incarnation of Jesus Christ. He ‘takes on flesh’ in our lives of love and service.” (E. Hahnenberg, GUTD p.93)

O my friends, we are *Beloved* as fully human: limited, fallible, and mortal that we are. We *glory* that we are as well, “fearfully, wonderfully made.” We *rejoice* in being friends of this awesome woman who shows us how to move into mystery and be fulfilled in it.

Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us now in this Advent full of expectations, and draw us ever more deeply into Praise, Love and Thanksgiving.