March 25: The Annunciation (Lk 1:38)

**HERE I AM**

The Second Vatican Council taught: "[Mary] By her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father" (Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 63). It is a point on which the Fathers of the Church insisted: Mary conceived Jesus in the faith and then in the flesh, when she said "yes" to the announcement that God addressed her through the intermediary of the Angel.

What does that mean? That God did not want to become a man by ignoring our freedom; that he wanted to go through the free assent of Mary, through her "yes." He asked her, "Are you willing to do this?" And she said, "Yes."

But what happened to the Virgin Mother in a unique way is also realized spiritually in us when we welcome the Word of God with a heart that is good and sincere, and when we put it into practice. It is as if God took flesh in us and came to dwell in us, since he makes his dwelling in those who love him and who observe his Word.

Pope Francis echoed the teaching of the Vatican Council in a recent homily:

“Mankind, at the origin, says *no* to God, and in the Gospel there is Mary who, at the Annunciation, says *yes* to God. In both readings, it is God who seeks mankind.

“But in the first case God goes to Adam, after the sin, and asks him: ‘Where are you?’ (Gen 3:9), and Adam responds: ‘I hid myself’ (v. 10). In the second case, however, God goes to Mary, without sin, who responds: ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord’ (Lk 1:38). *Here I am* is the opposite of *I hid myself*. *Here I am* opens one up to God, while sin closes, isolates, and causes one to be alone with oneself.

*“Here I am* is the key phrase for life. It marks the passage from a horizontal life, centred on oneself and one’s own needs, to a vertical life, ascending towards God. *Here I am* is being available to the Lord; it is the cure for selfishness, the antidote to a dissatisfied life, which is always lacking something.

*“Here I am* is the remedy against the aging of sin; it is the therapy for staying young within. *Here I am* is believing that God counts more than my ‘me.’ It is choosing to bet on the Lord, docile to his surprises. This is why saying *here I am* to him is the highest praise we can offer him.

“Why not begin our days with a ‘here I am, Lord’? It would be beautiful to say each morning: ‘*Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me.*’ We will say it in praying the *Angelus*, but we can repeat it now: *Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me!*

“Mary adds: ‘Let it be to me according to your word.’ She does not say ‘let it be done as I want,’ but ‘as you will.’ She does not place any limitations on God. She does not think: ‘I will dedicate myself partly to him, I will deal with it and then I will do what I want.’ No, Mary does not love the Lord when she feels like it, off and on. She lives by entrusting herself to God in all things and for all things. This [says Pope Francis] is the secret of life.”