



*Devotion to the Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart of Mary
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Fiat: The Most Important Word in History

There is one word that when uttered, changed the whole course of the history of mankind. This one word caused an event that had no precedent nor would ever be repeated. We can never return to what life was like before this word was spoken, nor will we ever be able to comprehend entirely how it has changed our whole world. All of creation is now different.

Creation came into being through the sheer and sole desire of our loving Triune God. We have heard the Scripture passage countless times. Creation took place through the creative utterances of God: “Let there be light ... let there be a dome in the sky ... let there be dry land ... let there be vegetation ... let there be lights in the sky ... let there be sea monsters and living creatures on the earth ... let us create man in our image.” (Gen 1) He needed no one to assist Him, no one to advise Him, no permission was required. Everything was good until sin entered the world and God’s image was disfigured in man.

Re-creation could not begin until this one word, this word which changed all of history, spoken by our race’s solitary boast was uttered. God Himself awaited the answer once the question was posed. And when the word, so simple, so profound, so pregnant with meaning and powerful in impact, was given in reply, the One eternal Word became Incarnate in the womb of the Virgin, the Virgin betrothed to Joseph. The Virgin’s name was Mary. (Luke 1:27)





The word she spoke? In English, “Let it be done.” In Hebrew, “Amen.” In Latin, “Fiat.” This word is the most powerful word ever spoken by a human person. With that one word all of creation is different, elevated, given a new meaning and her life and mission were forever inseparably intertwined and integrated with Her Son’s ... all the way to and including His Passion, death and resurrection.

A word such as this deserves our attention. Since this word brought about the most important event in history, let’s look at the “who, what, when, where and why,” but in a slightly different order.

First, the “what”. What does this word allow to happen? What is the import behind the utterance of Mary’s “Amen,” her “Fiat,”?

This word brought heaven to earth, the All-powerful, eternal God, creator of all things visible and invisible, who holds all things in existence, who cannot be contained in His own creation but holds all things in being, deigned, with the permission of the Virgin Mary, to become man in her womb ... and this changed everything.

This is the central event of all history, even the secular world recognizes this; commonly held, 2019 indicates the number of years since the birth of Jesus, current trends and science notwithstanding. Even if we are off by a few years, originally the numbering of years was based on what was thought to be the time of Jesus’ birth. When the time before Christ (BC) comes to an end, the era of AD (meaning *anno domini*, the year of the Lord) begins.

Another indication of its centrality is its frequent occurrence in art. The Annunciation is one of the most frequent subjects of Christian art (The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture, Peter Murray and Linda Murray, 1996, page 23), with depictions of the Annunciation going back to early Christianity, with the oldest known fresco of the Annunciation dating to the 4th century. (Images of the Mother of God, Maria Vassilaki, 2005 pages 158–159) Countless hymns and poems have tried to capture



and communicate the profundity and beauty of the humble acquiescence of the Virgin.

Such an important event, for centuries now, Christians have been encouraged to stop three times during the day, prayerfully repeat the scene, recalling and giving thanks for the most important event of all of history, the Incarnation of the Word with the cooperation of the Virgin, by praying the Angelus.

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,

And she conceived of the Holy Spirit...

Behold the handmaid of the Lord,

Be it done unto me according to thy word ...

And the Word was made flesh,

And dwelt among us ...

Just a little parenthetical note here, since it is the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, I would be remiss if I didn't add that we could not have this feast, we couldn't have the Blessed Sacrament without Mary's fiat. Jesus could not have said, "This is my body offered for you," without Mary first agreeing to give Him a body. The price of the Eucharist was the Passion, death and resurrection ... none of which would have been possible without the Incarnation. No wonder St. Bernard could exclaim, "The angel awaits an answer ... we too are waiting ... the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us. The price of our salvation is offered to you. ... This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race. Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste ... Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word."

As if that weren't enough to ponder in our hearts as Mary did, volumes throughout the centuries have been written to answer the next question. Who uttered this word? Concisely put, she is the Virgin



of Nazareth, the Virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. Well, that doesn't tell us much. Who is she? Scripture tells us much more. Like Maria in the Sound of Music, let's start at the very beginning, it's a very good place to start. In the book of Genesis (3:14-15) we read after Adam and Eve committed the first sin:

Then the LORD God said to the snake: "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all the animals, tame or wild; On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at her heel."

Mary is "the woman" promised in Genesis -- the first good news after the fall of Adam and Eve -- whose offspring would crush the head of the serpent. How do we know that? How do we know she is the woman? Jesus tells us so, and in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do; Truth Himself speaks truly or there's nothing true." (as translated by Gerard Manley Hopkins) We hear in the second chapter of the Gospel of John (1-5):

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." [And] Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."

Here at the beginning of His public ministry Jesus is not rebuffing his mother. He knows the eternal plan; He knows the redemption of mankind will be won with the cooperation of the woman of the promise. He is simply pointing out to her that if He performs this miracle at her request, His hour will come. Once it begins, there is no going back; neither His life nor hers will be same henceforward. By telling the servers to follow His direction, Mary agrees to take her place at His side as His glory begins to be revealed and He moves toward the definitive act of our redemption.



We will hear Jesus address her in this manner, with this title, again. As He hangs upon the cross, suffering excruciating pain, especially when He takes in a breath to speak, He says, “Woman, behold, your son.” (Jn 19:26)

There on the Place of the Skull, on Calvary, Jesus, the Offspring of the Promised Woman, definitively crushes the head of satan. He wants us to have no doubts who she is.

But lest we do, we hear this vocabulary used by one of the greatest theologians of all time: St. Paul. His most pointed reference to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is in Galatians (4:4), where he writes, in “the fullness of time,” meaning “when the mystery of Redemption begins to be fulfilled in the history of humanity” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 11), “God sent his Son, born of a woman.” With her all-important word, her fiat, “the mystery of Redemption begins to be fulfilled.”

The Woman chosen from the beginning of time, would be an off-spring of our fallen first parents, a member of the fallen human race. How could this be? How could one laden with sinful tendencies, with an intellect clouded with the effects of sin and a will weakened with the same, be a fitting dwelling place, a worthy ark of the New Covenant? Precisely. She couldn’t. The Catholic Education Resource Center defines miracles as “a supernatural sign or wonder, brought about by God, signifying His glory and the salvation of mankind. As a sign, a miracle is perceived by the senses and makes present the supernatural order, God’s governance of nature, and His loving plan of salvation. Miracles are a call to faith.” (CERC website: *The Church’s Teaching on Miracles*) Simply stated, God worked a miracle to prepare a fitting living Tabernacle in which the Word of God could become man.

Who is she who uttered this word? Who is she, this Woman of the Promise? She is the Immaculate Conception, the one hailed as “full of grace.” (Luke 1:28) God directly intervened in human history to prepare one for so great a vocation, to be the Mother of God. Mary was given the extraordinary grace of being conceived immaculately. She was preserved from all stain of sin from the moment of her conception in view of the merits to be won by her Son. Her conception and birth are the beautiful dawn



that precede the rising of the Son, they announce the coming of the One who would free us of our sin and open the way to heaven. She is the beginning of the new creation. This miracle of her Immaculate Conception definitely is a supernatural wonder brought about by God which “signifies His glory and the salvation of mankind.”

The Woman, promised to us in the first good news announcing the future Savior who would crush the head of satan, assists Him in this work of salvation. The first service she gives Him in this is to provide Him with a body and a human nature, without which He cannot suffer, without which He cannot redeem the world according to His eternal plan, without which He cannot give us the greatest proof of His love. As we will see in a few minutes, this is just the first service she gives. She will be His handmaid for the entirety of His life, giving service throughout.

Now the “when.” This is quite simple, for though a matter of faith, the Incarnation is also a fact of history. St. Paul describes the time of the Incarnation as the “fullness of time”. (Gal 4:4) For centuries, the Lord had been preparing the Chosen People to recognize Him when He would come to them. The Scriptures as well as other historical realities such as the peace of the Roman Empire and the genius, but incompleteness of the Greek philosophers, all prepared the world for the Logos.

A truncated time line of the “when” could look like this:

The eternal existence -- He always was, is, has no beginning -- of the Triune God whose nature is all love

Creation and man’s intimacy with God, walking with Him in the cool of the garden

Sin and the Fall of the human race, effecting separation from God

Centuries of spiritually wandering so far from Him that He has to reveal Himself again as the One, True God and call Abraham out of a pagan people

Centuries of preparation through the giving of the Law and the Prophets

Then the final preparation at the fullness of time: Mary



This is the “when.”

All of this also points to the “where”. I don’t necessarily want to talk about the geographical region where Mary was when she opened the door for our salvation, but in a more spiritual sense. Where was Mary? She was concretely, firmly planted in the midst of the Chosen People. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph of the House of David, says Scripture, so, most probably then she also is a member of the House of David, to whom was promised an everlasting throne and an eternal kingship. It was customary for men in first century Judaism to choose their brides from the same tribe. (University of Dayton, All About Mary) As a faithful Jew, Mary, with her pure heart and unclouded intellect, her lively faith, her inspired hope and her undying, ever-increasing love, knew the prophecies of Scripture with great insight. She had an understanding beyond those of the teachers of the law.

We also believe that Mary was located, so to speak, with the anawim, the poor and lowly faithful who awaited and expected the coming of the Messiah. Mary had, with the grace of God and by His gift, placed herself firmly within His will. Her fiat in answer to the Angel Gabriel’s invitation to become the Mother of God was not her first fiat. Mary already belonged entirely to God; she had become “nothing else but pure consent to the Spirit.” (Carlo Caffarra, *Living in Christ*, 175) Completely unhindered by sin or its effects, Mary was already and entirely docile and responsive to the movements of the Holy Spirit. Mary, even before the Annunciation, had “become [emphasis added] pure and simple consent ... one that is not even given in view of actions to be performed ... because it transcends and implies them all: it is simply a giving of consent, a pure passivity to any unforeseeable action the Spirit might wish to produce”. (ibid, 176) Mary was always “YES.”

Everything I have said so far could also be included in the “why.” The “why” is the reason for the who, the what, the where and the when. The why, the famous question of every toddler, is the reason for everything, what we all yearn for, hope for, pray for and rest in. The “why” of the fiat is our redemption



... the redemption that would be wrought through and with the human nature united to the divine person (and divine nature) of the Eternal Word, the Son of God, in cooperation with the Woman, at the fullness of time, who had been prepared by God and who had totally

placed herself in His will through her permanent stance of docility and availability, the Eternal Word Who would become man, dwell among us, and for the sake of our salvation, be rejected, betrayed, forsaken by His friends, falsely accused, beaten, scourged, crowned with thorns, forced to carry His cross and, finally, be crucified. (That, however, is not the end of the story. His resurrection and ascension are our Hope!)

The “why” is the content of the Good News! It is the Gospel! God became man -- and He could not do so without the assent of the Virgin -- to save us from our sins, to provide the way and the means for us, with the help of His grace, to attain our salvation and the meaning and purpose of our existence: eternal life with the Triune God and all of the angels and saints in Heaven. He went through incredible means to make this accessible to us; evidently that is what He wants for all of us. Mary could not have known all of the details, but she didn’t need to know. She trusted, she listened, she responded. She embraced God’s will as it made itself manifest. Easy isn’t quite the right word, but there was a certain alacrity, an eagerness to do all that was proposed to her, as the Woman of the Promise.

This could not have been just a one-time, here you go, “yes”. That would not have been sufficient. At most that would have made her a sort of surrogate, a stand-in. That type of a “yes” would have given the Eternal Word a human nature and a body, but nothing more. It would not have been what was indicated in Genesis. The Woman of the Promise would assist the Off-Spring of the Promise in the crushing of the head of satan.

Mary’s fiat was on-going, an ever-ready stance to assist in the entire work of redemption. All of Christ’s life was for our salvation, not just the moment of the Incarnation, and not only the last 24 tragedy-filled hours of His earthly life. All of His life was for our redemption; therefore, Mary, participating in all of His life, was participating in of His redemptive work.



We get a few glimpses; some I have already mentioned. There are more though, that will fill out the picture.

Luke is the only one who tells us of Jesus' Presentation in the Temple. Right away, only 40 days after His birth the shadow of the Cross and Mary's participation is brought to the forefront. We read from the second chapter of Luke (27-35):

He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,
according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.”

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you heart a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Mary had to say “yes, I accept, I embrace.” She was given a very clear reminder that her role would not be a passive one, but fiat, over and over again. His fiat and her fiat would take them both to the Cross and her heart would be pierced with the sword of sorrow not only then, but also throughout His whole life. As St. Bernard said: “The lance which opened his side passed through the soul of the Blessed Virgin ...”



† Let's not forget either, one of the events of which only Matthew provides an account: the flight into Egypt, when as an infant He was already pursued and His life sought. Her fiat was tested and strengthened from the very beginning. What a suffering not only to flee in the middle of the night to save the life of her Child, but also to know and feel in the depths of her motherly heart, the deaths of the holy innocents slaughtered in Bethlehem and its environs ... all because Herod felt threatened by the Infant King of Love. How deep was her fiat.

† Yet another of Luke's contributions is also from the early life of Jesus; there was the time He at 12 years old stayed behind in Jerusalem without telling either Mary or Joseph. For three days she did not know where He was. Imagine her thought: 'was she negligent? did she disrupt God's plan? He was only 12, could His hour have come already?' Was this not a suffering? She didn't understand why. When He was found, she questioned Him; His response, "Why were you looking for me?" Wouldn't that pierce your heart? "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49-50) Scripture tells us that she did not understand His answer, but ... Ahh ... things were going to be different and she had to be ready. She had to assist and not be in the way. She questioned Him no more.

† Historian that he is, Luke gives another instance of her presence during His public life. I am thinking of Jesus' rejection at that synagogue in Nazareth in the fifth chapter of Luke. Could we even imagine that Mary wouldn't have been there? That she wouldn't have shared in that suffering? That she wouldn't again have had to utter her fiat?

† Matthew also speaks of this and adds, "And they [those in the synagogue] took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.' And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." (Matthew 13:57-58) We hear of this in the Gospel of Mark as well. Being found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels we can



surmise the importance of this event. And remember, these were Mary's neighbors, her life-long acquaintances. Were these not sufferings, continual "fiats"?

† Other times as well when His own people wanted to stone Him or throw Him off of the brow of the hill and He passed through their midst because His time had not yet come. Fiat.

† Moving to John's Gospel, he shows her to be present at the beginning and the end of His public life, at the Wedding Feast of Cana and at the foot of the Cross. That sends a loud message: being at the beginning and the end, implies a continuous or consistent presence.

I don't think we will ever be able to comprehend how the shadow of the Cross fell upon every event, upon every moment of the lives of Jesus and Mary. Just as ever-present was Mary's fiat. It could be no other way. Even during His public life, Mary participated mystically in His Passion. How could she not? She knew the Word, the prophecies, the Psalms. She pondered them in her heart. From the Annunciation to the Crucifixion, Mary repeated, let echo, her most important word. The word that intimately associated her with her Son and His work of redemption. From the Annunciation to the Crucifixion, this word resonated and formed her every thought, word and action.

So there it is: the who, the what, the where, the when and the why of the most important word ever uttered with a human voice -- amazingly, not by any political figure or famous military leader, but by a seemingly insignificant child of an elderly couple in the tiny, indelible town of Nazareth. This word would resonate throughout her entire life. Her "yes" was not a passive, ineffectual agreement to some preordained plan to which she would make no active contribution. Sometimes her contribution was only her prayerful presence, her accompaniment, but it was real, actual, and in its own way, necessary. The New Adam needed a New Eve. The first Adam, with the assistance of the first Eve, sinned and brought death to the entire human race; the New Adam, the Second Adam, also with assistance, this time from the New Eve, redeemed the entire human race, making salvation and eternal beatitude a possible reality for all who believe.



This fiat is not just Mary's word, it was not meant to just resonate throughout her whole life, but it is the "yes" of the whole human race. She uttered this word for us as well. This fiat must resonate through every time and place, in every life and in every soul.

This is the word that unites us to Jesus. Yes, Jesus is the Way, but Mary is the way to the Way! For the past 10 years or so, I have had a holy card in my prayer book with a quote on it that reads,

"The word "Yes" is a little word.

But if it is used to embrace the will of God,

it acquires a tremendous importance

reaching beyond time and space

into eternity." (L Bertsche)

Throughout all of life, we must strive to see God's will in all that He sends and permits; in every situation there is the real possibility of and a profound opportunity for growth in holiness, of growing closer to Him. What is more wonderful, is that we can, through our own fiats, in imitation and in cooperation with Mary, help bring to all we encounter, the redemption that Jesus wrought for all mankind.

Mary's fiat was the defining reality of her whole life, the one word of her heart. If we want to learn from Mary, if we want to have a true devotion to her, to take her as our model, then the same must become increasingly more and more true of ourselves. In His will is our peace. (Dante, Paradiso)
Accepting and cooperating with His will as He makes it manifest to us is the Marian way.

Mary's fiat -- from the Annunciation to the foot of the Cross -- is the way for us to follow, it is the program and the treasure of our life. If fiat is the defining reality of our own heart, then she will make our hearts like unto her own, pure and holy for Him alone.

With Mary's life long fiat before us, present in our thoughts and hearts, let us thank God for His many gifts, especially Mary whose cooperation and participation helped win our redemption.



Since you do not have a copy of this prayer, I will pray it slowly so that as it resonates in your hearts you can make its sentiments your own.

O my God, Father of all and giver of all good gifts,
we thank You for all the blessings You have bestowed upon us,
even those unbeknownst to us.

We thank you for the gift of life, the gift of supernatural life
and the promised gift of eternal life.

Most especially we thank You for the gift of Your Mother
as our intercessor, guide and protectress,
as our own Mother.

May you be forever praised for the gifts you have given her for the benefit of us all.

In gratitude and with the help of Your grace and the assistance of Our Mother,
may we allow You to form our own hearts in the likeness of hers.

May fiat be the word of our hearts,
and with her, may our every thought, word and action
give You glory, praise and honor forever.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Your Son and Our Lord. Amen. +