



Simbang Gabi Mass

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Thursday 16 December, 2021
Good Shepherd Church, Lockridge**

Mary is such an important person in our Church's tradition, and she plays such an important role in this season of Advent. Mary was certainly a woman of great courage and hope, and she was also a person who knew how to wait patiently, not always understanding what God was doing in her life.

Just think for example, of her worry and confusion when the 12-year-old Jesus went missing in the large city of Jerusalem. But even in those moments of confusion and doubt and worry, Mary still always remained someone who trusted in God's presence and in God's plan. It may sound strange to some of us to think of Mary as someone who suffered doubt and confusion, we know from our Church's teachings that Mary, unlike us, was sinless. Sometimes we might be inclined to think that confusion and doubt are sinful thoughts, but of course that's not true, confusion and doubt are simply part of what it is to be human.

It's true that they sometimes may lead us away from God, but unless and until we deliberately turn away from God, they simply remain temptations, much like the temptations that Jesus himself experienced. To be tempted is not to sin, to give in to temptation and allow it to set us off in the wrong direction, that's what sin is all about. When God saved Mary from ever experiencing the reality of sinfulness in her own life, God wasn't making her more than human, he wasn't making her some kind of superhuman, he was simply making her, after Jesus himself, one who lived humanity to the full.

What Mary teaches us, as Jesus did, is that the most deeply and truly human response to confusion and doubt and to worry and uncertainty, is simply to entrust ourselves to God, with even more passion and even more commitment.

Mary needed this special gift of grace, which the Catholic tradition calls the immaculate conception, if she was going to be able to live out the vocation to which God had called her. And what was that vocation? To be the Mother of the Redeemer. And in doing so, to freely accept the gift of salvation offered to us by God, and to accept it on our behalf, because that is what she did. When Mary gave her yes to the Angels' message at the Annunciation, she was giving her yes to God's offer of salvation.



Jesus came among us, and we are able to celebrate his birthday next week because Mary said yes. See what can happen when you say yes to God. This was God's plan for Mary, but God also has a plan for each one of us, a special task that only we can fulfil in the world and God will give us whatever gifts we need to stay faithful to that task. Mary's task was unique, no-one else ever again will be called to be the mother of the Messiah. So, the gifts of grace given to Mary, especially the gift of total freedom from sin, also had to be unique graces. Our task in sense will be rather different, but whatever our vocation is, to be perhaps the mother or father of our children, to be the care giver of a sick relative, to be the peace maker in a difficult situation, to be the reconciler in our family, to be the healer in someone's broken life. Whatever our particular vocation might be, God will give us the gift of grace we need to be faithful to that call. Whether we receive those gifts and use them, that is up to us.

If we really believe this, then the words of Isiah from today's first reading will really begin to make sense to us. "With everlasting love, I have taken pity on you and my everlasting love for you will never leave you." The God who is calling us and inviting us to share with him the task of bringing healing and peace in our own time, in our own place, here in this part of the world in 2021 and beyond, that God is coming. He is always with us, offering us his gifts of grace, of compassion and of peace. He did that once for Mary and he continues to do that for each one of us.

So tonight, in this special Mass, at this particular moment, let us open our hearts as Mary did, to receive these gifts of grace that the Lord really wants to give us, so that like Mary, we too can then become bearers, carriers of God's grace and peace to all those we love and to all those we meet.

What a wonderful gift, a wonderful Christmas gift this would be for us to offer those we love and all those we encounter in our daily lives.