

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

ON MARY (Part 6)

FULL OF GRACE

**“Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.”
(Luke 1:28)**

Feast of the Immaculate Conception
December 8, 2009

The angel Gabriel greeted Mary, “Hail, favored one!” (Lk 1:28a). Other translations render this as “Hail, full of grace!”[1] The angel did not greet her as “Mary” but as “full of grace.” In effect, this was her name. In Semitic usage, the name given to a person signified that person’s calling in life. For example, her Son would be named “Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Mt 1:21b). And he would be named “Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” (Mt 1:23b).

What then did this naming mean? It meant that Mary was not only unstained by original sin, but that she was the embodiment of perfect holiness. Grace is the free gift of God Himself. Grace is the means by which one participates in the very life of God. Being filled with grace meant that Mary was favored by God, that she was immersed in His love, that God was profoundly present in her life, that she could live her life in outstanding holiness, and that God intended to use her mightily for His purposes.

God had acted in mighty ways before, as He used individuals for His purposes. God called Gideon to save His people from the Midianites. The angel appeared to Gideon saying, “The Lord is with you, O champion!” (Jgs 6:12). Gideon went on, with just 300 soldiers, to defeat the Midianites, Amalekites and Kedemites who were as numerous as locusts (Jgs 7:12).

God used a pious widow, Judith, to cause the defeat of the mighty Assyrian army and thus save God’s people Israel. Uzziah said to Judith, “Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all the women on earth; and blessed be the Lord God” (Jdt 13:18).

But none of these can compare with how God acted in the life of Mary. Now God was about an even mightier work, that of bringing salvation to all the earth. For this purpose He would send His very own Son. And for that, He would choose a lowly woman in Israel as His instrument.

And so the angel Gabriel made the proclamation. The Lord was with Mary. The Lord would use her mightily. She was the highly favored one. She was filled with grace.

The fullness of grace was displayed in Mary's virtues, which allowed her to respond with her yes to God, and to truly be prepared to be used mightily by Him.

First, she had the grace of humility. She had submitted her life to God, and accepted that her life was no longer her own, but God's to do with as He pleased. Even as the angel Gabriel's words greatly troubled her, she took to heart what he said with openness and surrender.

Second, she had the grace of faith. She knew God could accomplish anything, even the humanly impossible. She knew that God had only her good at heart, and she fully trusted that God's plan for her life was the best there could ever be.

Third, she had the grace of obedience. She was the Lord's handmaid, and she was open to anything God wanted to do in her life. All God had to do was to say the word and she would obey. Even today Mary stands out as the prime example of true discipleship.

Grace is necessary for one to be pure and holy. Mary was fully graced. Thus she is holy Mary.

Mary was pure and holy because she was destined to be the mother of God. Jesus, the Word made flesh, was "full of grace" (Jn 1:14). By God's design, as the bearer of the holy One, Mary too was made full of grace.

* * *

(This article is taken from the book *Forty More Days with Mary*)

[1] Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition.