

Fourth Monday of Advent, December 20 Is 7:10-14; Lk 1:26- 38

Ambition shapes humanity. It is what drives people to achieve. It spurred the growth of civilization, and it now continues to raise the standard of living throughout the world. It also brings destruction. Not only when it consumes powerful political leaders, resulting in war and tyranny, but also when it leads people to disregard those close to them and pursue a life of obsessive materialism.

Our own lives are shaped by our personal ambition. It causes us to create visions of who we want to be, and what we want to do with our time on earth. It leads us to dream, create goals, and it drives us to achieve them.

Before Gabriel appeared to Mary, the life she had envisioned for herself was presumably much different from the one she ended up living. At the time, she was young and betrothed to Joseph. She probably expected to live out her days similarly to most other women at the time: bearing and raising children, tending to the house, and eventually seeing her children married and having families of their own. However, after Gabriel came, her life had a few more twists and turns than that.

Mary could have refused and resisted but she chose to accept the path that God had laid out for her. She chose to put aside whatever vision she had created for her life and accept the vision of God.

What vision do we have for our lives? Where is our ambition taking us? Is the vision we have for our lives the one that God has? Unlike Mary, the vision that God has for us is not directly told to us. It is not easy to tell if the visions are aligned.

Aristotle believed that virtue was found in the balance of deficiency and excess; proper virtue was only found when something was directed towards its purpose. As Christians, it is our purpose to serve God's will and live out Jesus's teachings. Therefore, in order to be virtuous, our ambition must be directed towards this end.

What are we willing to sacrifice to achieve our goals? Should we be willing to sacrifice these things? To what end are our goals directed? Are they directed towards following the teachings of Jesus or are they only directed towards achieving material prosperity? While we can't know for sure what vision God has for us and where He is leading us, we can evaluate these questions. By taking the time to make our ambition virtuous, we can become more open to God's will rather than our own and, like Mary in this gospel, follow God's path when it finally becomes clear.

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