

4th Sunday – Advent – 2011
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She Said Yes. That's the title of a book written by the mother of Cassie Bernall...Cassie was one of the students killed in the Columbine High School massacre 12 yrs ago. ...Cassie's mom told the story of how her daughter – a girl struggling with teen anger, heavy peer pressure, and bad choices – was able to get free of her personal demons through her family's love, and a strong faith in Jesus Christ...A faith that was put to a severe test that day in the school library when two angry students stormed in with guns blazing. ..They'd already killed two teachers and several kids, mostly athletes - whom they hated...They also hated Christians., so when they saw Cassie under a table praying,...one of the killers asked her, "Do you believe in God?" She answered, "Yes,"...and they shot her dead. ...She was scared...She didn't know what they would do...But she said "Yes" and she died for her faith.

She Said Yes. That could also be the title of today's Gospel couldn't it?...The story of how Mary - another teenage girl - said "Yes" to G...Mary's YES had a much greater impact on the future of the world than Cassie's YES, ...but each of them faced a scary and risky situation with no way of knowing what the consequences would be, & in a tremendous act of faith, said "Yes" to God.

We are so familiar with this story of Mary and the angel, that we don't always appreciate how incredible Mary's response was to the angel's announcement,...how trusting and full of faith it was...Here was a young, Jewish girl, about 14 or 15...An angel suddenly appears to her and tells her she's going to conceive a child - a very special child...Yes, every child is special,..but this child would be the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah...Mary responds like any of us would...She knows the facts of life..."*Hold on. How can this be? I'm a virgin.*"...So Gabriel clears up her confusion, "*No problem. The Holy Spirit will take care of everything....Nothing's impossible for God.*"...And this time, M.'s response is much different: "*OK. If that's what God wants, then that's how it should be.*"...She says "Yes" to God

Man, talk about faith and trust...Talk about courage...Young Mary had to know that by going through with God's plan, she would be facing some big-time trouble...Here she was engaged to marry Joseph....Back then, being engaged was a lot different than today...It required the same faithfulness as marriage; in fact, the only way to break an engagement was to get a divorce.How would she tell Joseph.? ... I mean, could you just hear her saying to him., "You know, sweetie, how we've been looking forward to starting a family?...Well, uh, I kind of started already...I'm...uh...pregnant...But there was no man, dear...God did it."...Could she blame him if he divorced her?...What about her family and all the neighbors?...Would anyone believe that her pregnancy had nothing to do with any man? ...Would they banish her to a life of shame?...Or worse, she could be stoned to death; that's what they did to adulterers back then...Mary knew the risks, and even though she didn't fully understand how it was going to happen,...how it would all unfold,...she says "Yes."...Mary took the big risk she took because of her total faith and trust in God....If God is saying that it was to be this way, then it will all work out fine.

As we marvel at Mary's courageous faith,,...it's a good opportunity for us to reflect on our own faith,... I think what happened to Mary can happen to us...I don't mean the whole angel thing, ...but none of us know when we'll be hit with a major situation where we will be asked to say YES to God ...Some of us already have...It could be during a very serious illness –our own or someone we love...It could be a broken relationship...or a marriage that's hanging on by a thread. ...It could be that talk we had with our boss when we found out we no longer have a job...And then there's that trouble we find our self in because of some really bad choices we've made...It could be the phone call at 3am and the voice telling us there has been a terrible

accident....And there are those dark days and lonely nights we've been spending since we lost the love of our life.

Yes, for most of us – somewhere along the line - there will be challenging situations like these, where the outlook is terribly uncertain....And as we face the risks and possibility of a not-so-good outcome, God wants us to have faith and trust in Him,...in His promise that He will not leave us...that He will be there to help us get through anything... if we call on Him...He asks us, "Do you trust me...do you believe that I love you ...will you let me be the God of your life?"....He wants us – like Mary - to say YES.

When we say YES to God, we are taking to heart what St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God." (*Rom 8:28*)....Paul is saying that good will come out of everything that happens to us - even every trouble and crisis and heartache – IF we love God,...IF we trust God enough to say YES...Sometimes the good will be God bringing our trouble or crisis or heartache to a happy end...Other times, the good will be God giving us the strength and the courage and the people we need to get us through whatever comes even if it's not what we hoped and prayed for...When we say YES to God, we are saying, like Mary, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

Now it's not only during the troubled times in our life that we are called to say YES to God...We are challenged every day of our lives to say YES to God.. and NO to the pressures and temptations to live outside the Gospel of Jesus Christ....Every day – from the moment we open our eyes – God asks us to say YES to the good and NO to the bad, to choose the good and reject the bad... to choose love over hate...to choose generosity over greed....to choose forgiveness over vengefulness...to choose compassion over indifference...God asks us to choose life over violence and death ...to choose honesty over lying and cheating...to choose to be faithful to our marriage vows...God asks us to choose respect over prejudice, to choose justice over oppression,...to choose to stay sober over taking that drink or that drug,...to choose God's way over Satan's way...Saying YES to God,...choosing the good and rejecting the bad, can sometimes be very hard to do,...so we need to pray for God's help both at the start of our day...and any time during the day that we are faced with a choice to go one way or the other..."Lord, give me the strength and the courage to choose your way,...because I know that's the best thing I can do for myself, for the people in my life, for the world, and for You.

There's another way we are called to say YES to God....God chose Mary to bear His Son and bring Him into the world **2000 yrs ago**...God has chosen us to bring Jesus Christ into the world **today**...Just as Mary received Christ inside of her,...we receive Christ inside of us when we take the bread and the wine at Communion...And the "Amen" that we say before we receive Him, is saying to God "Yes, I believe this is the body and blood of your Son...and He is now part of me."...And if we really mean this,...if we truly believe we carry Jesus Christ within us,...then we have to bring Him out there, into our world that so desperately needs Him...We are the ones who have to make Christ's Gospel come alive in the world by living His commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you ."...We have to say YES to God.

OK, so Mary's YES to God prompts us to examine if and how we say YES to God,...which I think should get us to ask ourselves this question, "What kind of Christian have I decided to be?" ...Am I a Sunday only Christian where I just worship God at church and then forget about Him the rest of the week?...Am I a secret agent Christian where I believe in God but I never tell anyone about Him and never let others know that I let Jesus guide my life?...Am I a convenient Christian who worships God and serves others only when it is convenient for me and not too much of a sacrifice?... Or am I an all-in, completely sold out, fully committed Christian who tries to worship God with every breath, every action, and every word I speak,...and who wakes up

every morning and says, "Lord, I don't know what you have in store for me but I'm here for You... I trust that no matter what You ask of me, or whatever or whomever You send my way,...together we can handle it."... That's the kind of faith that God can use...to do great things...to make a difference in the world...Not many of us are there yet,...so let's do this...Let's give Jesus a birthday gift that will make Him very, very happy.Let's make a New Year's resolution – a promise to Him- that we will try harder to follow His Mother's example of faith and trust and saying YES to God.

AMEN.