

## “LET’S GET ON WITH IT!”

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When Communism fell in Eastern Europe a little more than a decade ago, many people said that a woman was responsible. The woman’s name is Mary. She was the mother of Jesus. She was poor and she was a woman at a time and in a place when to be either was to be vulnerable and without power. She was also what we might charitably call “an unwed mother.” Unwed mothers like Mary were thrown out of their houses and onto the streets. Respectable people called them unpleasant names and avoided them. They lived on the edges of society and gathered the crumbs from under its table. Mary is not the sort of person one would have chosen to start a revolution.

But God did choose her, and God chose her to do exactly that.

Mary understood this and she sang of it, in words we have heard this afternoon. I imagine that many mothers felt like singing when they were told they were going to have a child. I doubt that they sang words like these, however: ***“He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.”*** This poor, vulnerable, powerless, marginalized young woman believed that growing in her womb was the One who would make real the prophecy of Isaiah --- the One who would proclaim good news to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, liberate those who were in prison, give sight to the blind, and free the oppressed. Have any of us understood our children or ourselves as the ones through whom God’s promises will come true?

As Thomas Cahill writes, Mary’s song ***“is a larger-than-life song of triumph, thanking God for righting all wrongs by making a definitive choice in favor of the powerless over the powerful. No one knows it yet, but the poor, the hungry, and the humiliated have won!”***

In choosing Mary, God made very clear whose side she is on. If you are weak and vulnerable, God is on your side. If you are strong and protected, you better watch out. If you are marginalized and powerless, God is on your side. If you are proud and powerful, you better watch out. If you are poor

and hungry and long for justice, God is on your side. If you are rich, selfish, and satisfied, you better watch out. This is what Mary sang and what Mary believed, and this is the reason Mary's image was carried through the streets of Prague and Bucharest and Budapest and Berlin ten years ago.

I have participated in a revolution only once. In the spring of 1992, the Roman Catholic bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts told the parishioners of St. Joseph's Church that he intended to close their church and merge their parish with another. The parishioners tried to convince him to change his mind, but when it became clear to them that he would not reverse his decision, they refused to allow him to close the church. Instead, as one of their leaders put it, they "took over" the church. For more than a year, as they fought their battle in the civil courts and in the halls of the Vatican, they literally lived in the church, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There was no priest, but the work and witness of the church continued. Lay men and women led services and preached sermons, some of the most memorable sermons I have ever heard. If there was a need, it was met --- immediately --- whether it was mowing a lawn or visiting someone in the hospital. I admired the people of St. Joseph's Church. They offered me a new vision of what the Church could be. I joined them as often as I could.

At the end of each day, before we went to sleep on the church's wooden pews, we gathered around the statue of Mary to pray. Like Mary, we had only God's promise that she was on our side. Like Mary, we trusted the promise. And like Mary, we agreed to be the womb for the promise. We gave God permission to use us to make the promise come true. For God's promises to come true for us, we have to believe that they will come true. In fact, we have to live as if they are already fulfilled. God needs both our consent and our cooperation. This is the only way the promises will come true.

In July of 1993, it appeared that the Bishop of Worcester had won. On a sunny summer morning, police surrounded the church. Telephone lines were cut. Locks were changed. With parishioners still inside, workmen began to board up the stained glass windows and the sanctuary grew dark. The next day, with a crowd of thousands and cameras from all the major television networks looking on, crying policemen and women escorted the remaining parishioners from the church and the doors were locked. Was this the end of the story? Was the light that had shone in St. Joseph's Church forever extinguished?

No. Within that story, another story was unfolding, something we couldn't see. In ways we couldn't imagine or anticipate, God was preparing to do just what she promised to do. In 1995, the new bishop of Worcester re-opened St. Joseph's Church. God's promise came true.

Didn't it come true again this week. ***“He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted the humble and meek; he hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.”*** Which of us hearing or singing those words does not think of Cardinal Law, the prince of the Church pulled from his throne and sent empty away, and of the men and women whom he victimized and marginalized, men and women who now know that even if the Church is not on their side, God is.

The annunciation is not only for Mary. The angel is sent to each of us as well. The annunciation is not a moment confined to the pages of the Bible or framed and hanging in an art museum. It is an ongoing event and it is happening now. Just as God chose Mary, God chooses you and me to be the ones through whom her promises will come true. God chooses you and me to be the ones who will preach good news to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, liberate those who are in prison, give sight to the blind, and free the oppressed. God chooses you and me to nurture and give birth to the love that seeks to claim us and change us, and, through us, the world. Even now, God's angel leans close to us, and asks our consent. In W. H. Auden's extended poem about Christmas, "The Age of Anxiety," Gabriel says to Mary : ***“Child, it lies within your power of choosing to conceive the child who chooses you.”*** Will we choose the God who chooses us?

Thomas Cahill re-phrases Mary's response to the angel this way: ***“Here I am, the Lord's servant. Let's get on with it.”***

My dear brothers and sisters, let's get on with it!

OUTLINE: “LET’S GET ON WITH IT!”

The fall of Communism

- Mary’s role
- Poor and vulnerable --- treatment in Mary’s day.
- But God chose her.

Mary’s understanding, song; the prophecy of Isaiah.

Cahill quote about the Magnificat from “Desire of the Everlasting Hills”

Bring it home --- whose side is God on?

Relating it to me and my experience: the story of St. Joseph’s

- Background
- The community they became
- The end of the story?
- Another story unfolding --- trusting it.

The Magnificat becoming real this week in Cardinal Law’s resignation

What about us? The annunciation is an ongoing event --- happening to us now.

- God chooses us
- Will we choose God?
- Auden quote

Our response: Cahill quote