

“The Immaculate Heart of Mary and Her *Fiat*”
Tenth Annual Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary
The Fruit of Her Pondering: the Words of Our Lady
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Taking Mary’s words in their chronological order puts her *Fiat* at the first of the list. With that we really are taking the gem first, for it is this word that makes all her other words possible and meaningful.

Fiat is a Latin word, literally meaning “be it done,” or, “yes, I accept.” Living Mary’s fiat means to take what is set before us. Whatever God sends or permits, I accept from His hands. Mary’s fiat is a constant meditation for us, for **“Fiat” is the word of Mary’s Immaculate Heart.** “Fiat” defines her existence. “Fiat” formed her entire being. “Fiat” was her predisposition. “Fiat” was her vocation.

Yes, “fiat” is the word of Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

We see Mary live her fiat throughout her life; three quick examples will suffice: Joseph has a dream so they pack up in the middle of the night and leave for Egypt, fiat; all abandon Jesus, she stands at the foot of the cross, fiat; she alone remains faith-filled from Good Friday until Easter morning, fiat.

We first hear her fiat at the Annunciation. (*Read Annunciation account.*)

She had already vowed virginity and legally and truly been given in marriage to Joseph. Betrothal is a legal, binding contract. Then the angel comes with a message from God.

God too had a proposal for Mary. He asked her, through the Angel Gabriel, “Will you be the Mother of My Son?” With this question the All-powerful God, Creator of all, respects His own creation and honors our dignity; He places Himself in need of a collaborator. At the same time,

He “put the destiny of all mankind in this young woman’s hands” (JPII, *Theotokos*, 137). St. Bernard, whose great love for Our Lady is expressed eloquently in His writings and in His sermons, describes the scene: “all creation held its breath waiting for her reply.”

Because she had never refused God anything – her will was not injured by original sin and her intellect not clouded – she is able to respond with a complete unhesitating response: Fiat. She had thoroughly cooperated with all the graces offered her and now, even though she did not understand how she could be both virgin and mother, she placed all her trust in Him and said, “Fiat, yes, ... I am all yours, do with me what you will.” This is true obedience of faith. She believed in God, she trusted Him, she, in one sense, could not, not obey. Her beliefs had a direct influence on her life. Her faith directed all of her decisions. Previously, she had followed an inspiration from God to vow virginity doing so even though a woman’s children were her glory; now, He asks her to be a mother. She does not understand, but she accepts. **“Fiat” is the word of her heart.** She has so completely given herself to God she cannot refuse His proposal. “Fiat” was her vocation; it was her life.

What will this mean in regards to Joseph? Legally and truly, she is Joseph’s wife. She agrees to become a mother, without consulting Joseph. Mary’s trust in God and in Joseph must have been magnificent. No where does Scripture indicate that Mary told Joseph what had happened. She trusted that God, who had communicated with her, could and would communicate also with Joseph and she trusted that Joseph would know what to do when he learned her secret.

Consequently, hers was a life of total obedience: no hesitation, no qualification, no checking the terms of the contract. Simply, with great trust and with purity of heart, she says, “Fiat.”

Her only question was “how?” Her question did not indicate incredulity on her part, thinking that God was not capable to arrange what He asked her to do. Simply, she asked what she needed to do to bring this about. How could she, a virgin, become a mother?

Even when the Angel Gabriel explained she could not possibly have immediately and fully comprehended the full impact of the Incarnation. Remember, up to this point there was no

concept of a Triune God and yet the angel's explanation contained words such as "the Holy Spirit" and "Son of the Most High." And still there is trust and acceptance. She placed her entire self at His disposal: her intellect, her will, her body. Everything was His to do with as He willed. It is interesting to note that though the English translation of this Greek text uses the word "handmaid", the original Greek says "slave." Mary identifies herself as God's slave. A servant works certain hours of the day and then returns to home and family. A slave, on the other hand, is the property of the master, to be at his beck and call; literally, Mary willingly recognizes herself as belonging to God as His possession to do with what He wills. She abandoned herself to a mystery because she knows the One proposing to be trustworthy. With the mention of Elizabeth's pregnancy she is confirmed in her belief that nothing is impossible with God.

The Fiat is the crucial moment of fidelity ... Mary cannot comprehend everything, but she accepts the mystery and gives it a place in her heart; she pondered it in her heart and she abandons herself to the mystery with the availability of one who opens herself to be inhabited by Someone greater than herself and she receives the Word of God into her womb.

I want to diverge slightly from my topic to consider the significance of the fiat from a Eucharistic point of view.

Bishop O'Malley from Boston said in one of his homilies, "Certainly the Eucharistic moment in Mary's life comes at the annunciation when Mary says yes to God ..." He continues, "When the Angel Gabriel asks Mary to be the Mother of God, she answers with a resounding yes – and that yes allows something wonderful to happen. God becomes man – the Word becomes flesh."

This free act of Mary, her assent, is the prerequisite act for Jesus' fiat in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but Thine be done." Mary' fiat was the prerequisite for the Son of God's total act of self-giving first at the Incarnation and then at the institution of the Eucharist, the one act that had

two moments: the first moment was at the Last Supper when He took, blessed, broke and gave the Bread and Wine which had become His body and blood and then the second moment at the Crucifixion, when Jesus poured out all He had in one total act of love.

Mary's fiat made that possible.

Her self-gift made possible the Eucharist we receive and adore. With this in mind, we too can give our fiat when we are offered Holy Communion. Our "Amen" signifies the same faith, the same belief as Mary's fiat at the Annunciation. "In continuity with Mary's faith in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the One whom she conceived through the Holy Spirit was the Son of God and Son of Mary. We are asked to believe that Jesus is present in his full humanity and divinity under the sign of bread and wine." Mary was the first tabernacle; we, too, after we receive Holy Communion, are tabernacles.

One other Eucharistic connection: Mary did not speak Latin. As I said at the earlier this evening, "Fiat" is Latin for "be it done" or "yes, I accept" or "yes, I believe". Mary's response, in her own language would have been the one, simple word, "Amen." Mary said "amen" and received the Son of God into her body. Each time we process up to receive Holy Communion we too say "Amen" and receive the Body of Christ. Isn't that worthy of reflection?

End parenthetical note.

Mary's perfect "yes" spoken to God is the immaculate fiat by which our Redeemer was welcomed into the world. Her faith enabled her to trust in His plan. Her yes changed the history of the world. Her yes, her fiat, proves her union with the Divine Will. She was, in fact, "in total obedience to the saving will of God expressed in the Angel's words" (JP II, 137).

Union of wills with God is the ONLY way to heaven. We must be united in will with Him. We must want what He wants, love what He loves, do what He does, and judge as He judges. Granted, we are not immaculate like Mary, so our fallen human nature will, at times, revolt; we will fall, we will fail, we will break our resolutions... but we have the wonderful sacrament of Confession. Though we do not always do what we want to do, and often do what we do not want to do, we must always strive to will what God wills – to maintain union of wills. We cannot go to heaven willing what God does not will and not willing what He wills.

So, now, how does all of this apply to us? How does the fact that **fiat is the word of Mary's heart** affect us? How can that help us on our own spiritual journey?

Pope John Paul II answered our question; he wrote, "By her conduct, Mary reminds each of us of our serious responsibility to accept God's plan for our lives" (JPII, 137). Don't we already pray this? In the Lord's Prayer we echo Mary's fiat and Jesus' fiat; we say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "Thy will be done in me, here today, always. May I never oppose myself to Your holy will. I am all yours to dispose of, to use, according to Your will, to fulfill Your holy plan. Fiat.'

St. Thomas Aquinas says in the Summa, "She uttered her yes in the name of all human nature." If she had not said fiat, we could not say fiat. She has already said yes, and consequently the victory has been won. Now let us say our fiat with hers, let us unite our fiat with hers.

Why? Because God proposes still. He has a plan in which we all have an instrumental part to play. We are part of a bigger picture. We should never make our decisions thinking only of ourselves. Everything we do has consequences. Everything we do affects others. More than that, we should act according to God's will because that is what will make us happiest and holiest. He knows how to make us happy and He knows how to make us holy. Yes, God makes proposals to each of us. We, too, have to say "yes, fiat," even when we don't understand; we have to make ourselves completely available to God's holy will, trusting that He knows best and He wants the best for each of us. Often times, it is only after we say yes and accept His proposal that we can begin to understand.

To respond in this way is to respond in a Marian manner, whatever your vocation.

In Mary we can see a profound docility. “Docile” means teachable. Because Mary was humble, God could teach her and lead her along the chosen path. To follow the Lord’s prodding, to hear His inspiration we have to have the prayerful spirit as did Mary, we have to have the spirit of service, that of active charity, as did Mary. We have to be willing to be led.

Think of Mary. At a very early age the Lord inspired her to give herself to Him entirely and unreservedly. He inspired her to vow her virginity in a time when it was shameful to be childless. She did so, trusting that He who had inspired her to do so would take care of her, especially in her old age. She was set on that path.

Then came the troublesome greeting of the Archangel. She who gave her maternity to the Lord was given it back in a way incomprehensible. Her path now took her through different scenery. Yes, a virgin, but now, also a mother. To be able to follow the unexpected nature of God’s manifest will, Mary had to be docile. She had to be ready to change her way of thinking and see the hand of God. Yes, with God’s intervention, she could be both virgin and mother.

That’s a good practice for us as well. If we are so sure of ourselves that we can’t see or hear the will of God as it is made manifest, then we are not docile, nor available nor willing.

There are two spiritual practices especially that help us be docile and thus to living the fiat.

The first is to live a recollected life. This simply means to try to live in the presence of God. He is always with us, but we are not always with Him. Try to stay in contact with Him throughout the day, throughout your duties.

Remember that the Triune God dwells in you. You don’t have to go anywhere special to be heard by Him. He is here: in you, in me, among us as we gather in His name. Just remembering this on a daily basis, different times throughout the day, will begin to change your life. Speak to

Him about what you are doing, who you are with, what your joys and concerns are. Use exterior means to help you remember: holy images, medals, a rosary in your pocket. We know one devout woman, a close friend of Mother Joanne's, who would set a place at the table for Our Lady. That is simple faith.

You will soon find, if you are faithful to this practice that you don't have to speak to the Lord constantly. You will be happy to be in His presence, just as you are happy to be with the ones you love. Words become less and less necessary.

It will become quite natural: instead of fretting, you pray; instead of losing your temper, you pray; instead of being discouraged, you entrust it to the Lord. Your sense of gratitude increases as you become more and more aware of all that He does for you.

A second practice is referred to as **living the sacrament of the moment**. This moment, right now, is the only one we have to grow in holiness. I can't change the past, though I can make reparation for it, and I am not yet in the future. I have this moment: here and now. What am I going to do with it? Will I use it to grow in holiness or will I be indifferent? It requires attentiveness to take advantage of the sacrament of the moment. Each moment of our lives offers us an opportunity to grow in holiness. God would not allow it if it were otherwise. He wills our holiness; therefore He cannot will anything that will not enable us, if we cooperate, to grow in holiness.

It seems as if we live in the past and the future more than we care to admit. Worrying over the missed opportunities for holiness in the past or constantly planning for the future but never taking any concrete steps to implement our plans for holiness are both diversions of the devil. Thinking only of the past and our missed opportunities we become distracted and too discouraged to do anything now; always planning great heroic deeds, prayers, pilgrimages, mortifications or acts of charity, saying the daily rosary or going to daily Mass, but never getting around to doing them, leaves us empty and unsatisfied. Now is the moment; today is the day to put our resolutions into practice.

We can grow in holiness each moment of the day by being faithful to the duty of that moment, thus each moment can be sacramental. Do what you are supposed to be doing, give attention where attention is due. Wishing to be somewhere else, doing something else, with someone else is not a way to holiness. God has placed you where you can best grow in holiness, with whom you can best grow in holiness.

Doing the will of God right now at every moment is all that matters. If we do His will we will be doing what is best for everybody. St. Augustine told us long ago: entrust the past to God's mercy, the future to His providence and the present to His love. Live in His love.

I am sure some of this seems out of reach, but it's not! It just requires a conscious effort. St. Teresa of Avila says the most important contribution we make to our prayer life is determination and perseverance. We must keep trying!

Mary's response was perfect. We will never encounter such a proposition; we will never be asked to give God a human nature! She was prepared from the first moment of her existence and in her purity she was able to respond so selflessly through the graces offered her. It follows then that the more pure our heart is, the better we will be able to imitate her and live her fiat. A pure heart is an undivided heart. As pure gold has no alloy, a pure heart has no clutter, no divisions. It is all God's. The more we purify our hearts the more in tune we will be to God's holy will, the more perfectly we will respond with our fiat.

To conclude ...

One of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite people, Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, goes like this: "To be 'devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary' ... means to embrace the attitude of heart which makes the fiat the defining center of one's whole life." Our devotion must change our lives. If we are truly devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary we cannot carry on status quo, we must "embrace the attitude of heart which makes the fiat the defining center" of our lives. Fiat is the word of Mary's Immaculate Heart; may it also be the word of our hearts.

Say “Amen,” “Fiat” to all God asks of you and you will be living the Fiat, the Marian way.