

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 11 November 1981

Word of Life

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

This, too, is a word of the Scriptures which we as Christians are called upon to live. I think you already know in what extraordinary event it was pronounced and who had said it.

An angel visiting Mary, a young girl of Nazareth, forewarns that she would become the mother of the Messiah.

But Mary, who had decided to remain a virgin, understands the insurmountable difficulty of fulfilling what was being asked of her, and she requests for a sign. The angel reveals that also Elizabeth, her cousin whom everybody considered sterile, is also expecting. "In fact," the angel concludes, "nothing is impossible to God."

It is at this point that Mary declares:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. "

Mary, in front of God who chooses her to be the Mother of the Messiah, who makes her a protagonist in His plan of salvation, manifests an unconditional trust, and she surrenders herself to Him. But in all simplicity and with the freedom of love, she asks for the light to understand. She is a daughter who acts as such before God, her Father. Once enlightened, however, she commits herself to Him with her whole being.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. "

Having known her destiny, made certain by the sign offered to her, sure of God's omnipotence, Mary then expresses her act of obedience and of faith.

From beginning to end, the commands of God in line with salvation had demanded obedience. It's with Abraham's act of obedience, that the story of salvation started. It is with an act of faith and obedience that Mary said 'yes' to God's plans, when the fullness of time came. With an act of obedience Christ entered into the world and in the same way, with an act of obedience, He left it. This month's Word is this:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. "

To fulfil His designs, God only requires persons who submit themselves to Him with all the humility and availability of a servant. With her attitude, Mary — the true representative of humanity whose destiny she takes upon herself — offers to God all the room He needs for His creative activity.

However, the words "handmaid (servant) of the Lord", besides being an expression of humility, was also a title of nobility which was attributed to the great servants of the story of salvation such as Abraham, Moses, David and the Prophets. Hence, Mary, with these words, also affirms all her greatness.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. "

Mary's words express how you, as a believer, should live precisely your Christian reality. In fact, they have always been considered the climax of every religious conduct in front of God, because they are at

the same time an expression of passive availability and of active readiness, because they are an unfathomable emptiness of self and perfect fullness of the soul.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. "

But God has called not only the Virgin to generate Christ in herself: though in a different manner, every Christian, and this includes you as well, have a similar task.

You, too, have to incarnate Christ in your very person, by welcoming into yourself, with the same attitude that Mary had, the Word of God, that Word which is being announced to you, for example, during Holy Mass on Sundays and holydays, or which you come to know from the reading of the Gospel, or also this commented 'Word of Life' which you receive month after month.

Try to receive it with an attitude of total availability, knowing that it is not the word of human beings. Being the word of God, it carries in itself a certain presence of Christ. Welcome Christ, then, in you, in His Word. And with the most active readiness, put it into practice, moment by moment.

If you would do this, the world will see Christ again, passing through the streets of our modern cities; Christ in you, dressed like everyone else, working in the offices, in schools, in the various environments, in the midst of everyone.

And, what is more, as a result of Jesus living in you, the world will see the spark of an evangelical revolution starting off and which transforms all: people and society for a more humane, more kind, more united world.

Therefore courage! Let's encourage one another! There is a magnificent, divine adventure waiting for us. We must not lose this chance.