

SAYING “YES” TO GOD

Last week when Brian Burton was with us he challenged the people present to simply say, “yes Lord.” Let’s think about “Saying Yes to God”. The fact that we are even pondering the matter, the fact that we have the option of saying “yes” or “no” to God in the first place speaks volumes of His loving nature. Our God allows us free choice in all matters; He is no absolute monarch who demands blind obedience. He doesn’t want slaves, He wants sons and daughters. If you read through the Bible and find all the men and women who decided to say, “yes” to God, you will notice that it was always of their own free will.

Noah had the choice of building an ark or not building an ark. Fortunately for us (and him), he chose to build it. Moses stood before a burning bush and said ‘yes’ to God, even though doing so placed him in great danger when returning to Egypt. Blessed Mary said ‘yes’, with her beautiful answer, *“my soul magnifies the Lord”*. The disciples said “yes” even though it meant danger, deprivation and persecution. We recall the story from the book of Matthew: As Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee he watched two brothers, Simon (now known as Peter) and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea. They were fishermen. He said to them, *“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men”*. They immediately left their nets and followed him. They said ‘yes’, even though it meant leaving everything behind.

Who did Jesus call as his disciples? Plain, ordinary people like you and me. God issues us all an invitation to a fuller life. We first received the invitation at our salvation, and then later at our water baptism, when we made our own decision. But God’s plan for us doesn’t end there. He calls upon us to use the precious gifts he has given to us throughout our lives.

Let me emphasise this point: we don't have to be perfect to say "yes" to God...and He doesn't expect us to be perfect after we say "yes". He loves us as we are - although it certainly becomes more difficult to do bad things once we start doing good things. Mother Teresa could have lived a very rewarding and relatively comfortable life in a Polish convent, but God asked her to consider another path, which led her to the "poorest of the poor" in India. He didn't command her to go there, but he asked and she said 'yes'.

Now, obviously, we aren't all called to do heroic things like Mother Teresa, nor like many of the martyrs; but each and every one of us has our own unique talents that God asks us to share. God values all of these. Just imagine two glasses sitting on a table, both filled to the brim with water. A very godly woman once wrote the following: *"You sent me off to fetch one of Father's big glasses and had me put my little thimble by the side of it; then you filled them both with water and asked me which I thought was fuller. I had to admit that one was just as full as the other because neither of them could hold any more. That was the way you helped me to grasp how it was that in heaven the least have no cause to envy the greatest"*. Ordinary people say 'yes' to God and do both ordinary and extraordinary things as a result. Remember Brian Burton's catch phrase? "Ordinary people doing extraordinary things!"

By saying "yes" to God, we are essentially saying that He is the most important thing in our lives, and that all good things spring from that wonderful fact. In the book of John, Jesus says: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples—your love for one another."* We have a special challenge each and every day to live with love. To say, "yes" to love! Some days are easier than others.

When Jesus was about to ascend into Heaven, He told his disciples that He wouldn't be with us on earth, yet He would not leave us helpless. He promised us two things: The Church and The Holy Spirit. Through the grace of His church (His body on earth), and the guidance of His Holy Spirit, we are able to act as Jesus' representatives on earth, until he returns again. We are able to use our minds and bodies to serve others, as Jesus did. Note, Christ has no hands on earth but yours and mine!

Jesus walked His talk, and so must we. We can TALK like people of God, but if we are going to be honest, we have to ACT like people of God as well. In the book of Matthew, Jesus told this parable: *"There was a man who had two sons. He approached the elder and said, 'Son go out and work in the vineyard today'. The son replied, 'I am on my way, Sir,' but he never went. Then the man came to his second son and said the same thing. The son said in reply, 'No, I will not' but afterward he regretted it and went. Which of the two did what the father wanted?"* The answer, of course, was the second son—the one who actually did as he was requested. It's OK to change your mind if you are being obedient to God's command. So, once we decide to say, "Yes" to God, we must live up to that commitment. Jesus said yes to God and took upon Himself the sins of the world and died on the cross for us. He really walked His talk...can we do less?

With many things, it probably took most of us far longer than it should have to say "yes"; and as we look back now with the perspective of time, we realise that God had been asking us to change for a long time and that more and more we had been whispering (not shouting) "yes" - increasing in faith by baby steps. I think that one "yes" just naturally leads to another. As you know, there are many, many great ways to say "yes" to the Lord, no matter what your age, your gender, your situation or your particular talents. But it will take faith!

We know that God will ask things of us again and again, just as we ask God for His help time and time again. And by continually saying “yes” to God, we can have the satisfaction that the apostle Paul felt near the end of his life, when he knew that he had “fought the good fight (of faith), and run the good race”. What a tremendous blessing that must be.

God will not ask anything of us that we are not capable of doing. But how will he ask us? Probably not by letter, text, telephone call or e-mail. Not even via Twitter. For some of the saints in the Bible He appeared as a burning bush or as a voice out of a thundercloud, but I wouldn't count on that. He certainly has plenty of other ways. It may be a gentle stirring of the soul, a pang of conscience, or an unexplained feeling of elation. God does ask us to do things—or not to do things—in subtle ways.

However, let's not forget that prayer is a two-way conversation...where we listen as much as we talk. We ask many things of God, so we shouldn't be surprised if He asks many things of us. If we listen carefully, we will discern what God is asking. And when God does ask something of us, what can we say? We have the right to say “no” because He doesn't make us slaves. We can say, “let me think about it and get back to you”, or we can say “too busy now, perhaps when I retire” or, “I'd rather serve you in some other way” or, any number of other answers. But the answer most pleasing to God is this one: “YES”.

If today you hear His voice... simply say, “YES LORD”.