

## Homily: 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

During my break I spent a day in Walsingham, the national shrine of Our Lady in England. It's a beautiful little place and well worth visiting if you're ever in Norfolk. Nearly a thousand years ago a local lady had a vision in which she saw a vision of the holy house of Nazareth, where the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to ask her to be the mother of our Saviour. The lady built a replica of the house in Walsingham, and it became one of Europe's most important shrines.

Being in Walsingham reminded me of a story I heard last summer, from Archbishop Peter Smith, who sadly died a few months ago. He was talking about when he was Bishop of East Anglia, and was on a visit to Walsingham when his phone rang. He answered it, and found that the call was from the papal nuncio in London, the Pope's ambassador to the United Kingdom. The nuncio is responsible for relations between the UK and the Vatican, but also has the responsibility of liaising between the Pope and the bishops, including when a bishop is to be asked to move and take up a new appointment. When Archbishop Peter answered the phone, he told the nuncio that he was in Walsingham. "I'm glad you are in Walsingham!" came the reply. "Why's that?" the Archbishop asked. "Because Our Lady, she said yes," the nuncio told him. He knew then that he was going to be asked to move and take up a new appointment.

The nuncio's comment sums up the whole of Mary's life. She said "yes". Yes to God, yes to His plan, yes to His will in her life. At Nazareth Mary said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me as you have said." And this "yes" was renewed at every moment of her life. In this way, Mary shows us how to live what is taught in the Gospel today: the importance of our "yes" to God. This is not a one-off submission to the will of God, but a readiness to accept His will in every moment of our lives, and to live as He teaches us.

Today's readings point us to two central aspects of our Christian lives: conversion and faithfulness. Conversion is needed when there is some part of our lives in which we say "no" to God: we cling on to our own will, we refuse to let God in. Then we need that "no" to become "yes" to Him: this is conversion. In the Gospel today the first son does precisely this: he says "no" to his father's request, but afterwards thinks better of it and goes to work, as his father has asked. The first reading speaks of this, too: "When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live," God says. Here is a real message of hope: no matter what our history, what failings we have had or still have, we can always change and be forgiven: a new life is possible for us with God.

But the readings also carry a warning: we can go the other way too. We can lose some of our zeal for the Lord, our commitment to following Him. Our "yes" can become gradually more reluctant, even to the point of becoming "no". The first reading warns that sometimes the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin, and this brings death. The second son in the Gospel at first says "yes" to his father, even calling him "sir", but then he changes his mind and does not do what he is asked. So the readings call us also to

faithfulness: to continue to say “yes” to God in all the ways where His grace is already at work within us.

St Paul today teaches us to be united in our convictions and united in our love, “with a common purpose and a common mind”. And he makes it clear that this common mind is not simply a consensus, but a union with the mind of the Lord. “In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus”, he teaches. Jesus’ life was lived in perfect union with the will of His Father: He was obedient even to the point of death, death on a cross. His life was always “yes”. Let’s ask Him to give us the grace of faithfulness in those areas of our lives which we already live in union with God; and let’s pray that grace will be at work in those parts of us which stubbornly refuse the Lord, so that there may be real conversion in our hearts, a real openness to His will and to His immeasurable gifts, and the real hope of new life which conversion offers us.

Fr Andrew

