"But grace always enters through just such a wound."

A warm hello to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition! Barbara McGuigan here, alive and grateful for this precious time of Advent that has begun for us. "The season of Advent has a holiness and sweetness all its own." May we all have the good sense to recognize its significance! God's airwaves are open. Here are the numbers to call:

In North America call 1-800-585-9396

Outside North America call 1-205-271-2985

Our email address is Openline@ewtn.com.

Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P., editor of the monthly *Magnificat* prayer book, wrote such a beautiful editorial in this December's issue that I wish to share it with you to soften our hearts and put to rest all the turmoil that living life seems to bring. Fr. Cameron begins with a verse from St. Matthew:

> "Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child" (Mt 1:18). When Joseph learned of this, he "decided to divorce her quietly" (Mt 1:19). Joseph did this because he presumed that Mary was in love with someone else. Joseph loved Mary so much that he would not stand in the way of her happiness, even if it meant losing her to another man. The Gospel says that Joseph "was a righteous man" (Mt 1:19). But look what it says next: "Yet unwilling to expose her to shame...," as if to say that if Joseph were strictly just – if he followed the laws and moral code of his time to the letter – in justice he should have exposed her to the authorities. However, Joseph had conceived a righteousness in his heart that was as alive and godly as the child Mary had conceived in her womb.
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> Nonetheless, the night that Joseph learned the news, he went to bed wounded. But grace always enters through just such a wound. An angel appeared to him as he tossed and turned in his tortured sleep, and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home...She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus" (Mt 1:20-21). If the angel had proposed a program instead of a person, Joseph may very well have banished the angel to hell, thinking him to be a being from that place. For, as Pope Benedict XVI tells us, "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea – Christianity is not a program. But the encounter with the angel moved Joseph to put his eyes on God's Presence instead of on his own preconceptions, his hurt, or his plans. With the inbreaking of this Presence, Joseph divorced the idea of divorcing Mary. The thing he previously was dead-set against now became the very meaning of his life.

But why did Joseph believe the angel in his dream? Notice that the angel does not show Joseph the "five year plan" of his life. What if he had informed Joseph, "You are going to flee your homeland and live in exile in Egypt as a marked man with your wife and with an infant son you did not sire, hunted by the murderous King Herod?" Would he go along with that plan? Would you?

And yet, Joseph does exactly that with astonishing obedience. Why? Because the angel does now show Joseph a "vision"; he moves him to look at reality – at the way God was acting in his life right then. The shock that came with Mary's news revealed something to Joseph: he was living true poverty of spirit. For the catastrophic turn of events convinced Joseph he was not in control of his own destiny. In his poverty, Joseph "owned" only one thing: an endless, expectant awaiting. This "Jesus" whom the angel announced was the fulfillment Joseph had been waiting for all his life.

The happiness Joseph hoped to live with Mary was to be given to him in a new and surprising way. In the Spirit's gift of this miraculous Son, Joseph was to be given something greater than anything he could have ever imagined or invented on his own. It moved Joseph to say yes unreservedly to absolutely everything that that gift entailed, even being a fugitive in Egypt. The angel asked Joseph simply to look at what God was making happen in his life concretely at that moment. When Joseph compared those facts to the longings of his own heart, he knew that the most reasonable thing he could do was believe the angel and follow.

And so Joseph sprang up and raced to his young wife. He exclaimed, "Mary, now I understand everything. I know that it is God's will that I take you into my home. I know that you have conceived a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. I know that you are to bear a Son. And I know that his name is to be..." With that, Mary gently raised her hand, stopped her husband, and said, "Jesus." The amazed Joseph asked, "But how did you know!" Because an angel had revealed that name to the Blessed Virgin. What united Mary and Joseph in the truth and assured them that God could be trusted was the Holy Name of Jesus. May the same be so of us.

Brothers and sisters, we are told that Joseph was "a righteous man." Sometimes we think the word "righteous" to be condescending, as if it meant “self-righteous.” "Oh, Cindy is such a righteous person," meaning Cindy is a judgmental sort of person. But this sort of rigidity is not at all what moves the biblical writers to poetry about "blamelessness" and "walking in the way of the Lord."

Rather, for them, the "righteous" or "blameless" person is, above all, the free, blessed and deeply happy person, because he or she lives in reality, is just, is "right" with God and, therefore, balanced and healthy. Joseph was "right" with God, but did that mean that he did not go "to bed wounded" the night he learned the news about Mary? Of course not.

How did Joseph survive such woundedness? Because "Grace always enters through just such a wound." We cannot always understand why certain things happen to us or to our loved ones, but as Christians, we confidently await the encounter: with Christ, an encounter with the Source of All Grace; even an encounter with an angel, to see us through our woundedness.

In other words, we keep our eyes on the prize! With total abandonment and trust in The Presence, do we not finally awaken to the fact of how foolish it is to think that we have total control over our own destiny? We have no idea how things will work out sometimes, especially when the circumstances are very ugly, but neither did Joseph, neither did Mary. But both Joseph and Mary focused on the Holy Name of Jesus, not on "darkness and nothingness and impossibility," and they both responded with a resounding "Yes!"

Mary and Joseph are signs to us from God that, as a wise person has said, "No circumstance warrants despair... because there is no human circumstance in which He is not present." Joseph didn't need some "five-year plan;" He needed His Lord and Savior and the Blessed Virgin. Joseph didn't need to know all the "what ifs" before he gave his consent; he needed the virtues of obedience, of poverty of spirit, of resignation to the perfect will of God.

So, let us ask, "How is God acting in my life at this very moment?" Is it sorrow or is it joy; is it unemployment or abundance, is it sickness or good health; is it spiritual vibrancy or a desert experience? No matter, because whatever God is asking of us at the moment, we know with all certainty that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, to increase our joy for all eternity and to bind the wounds of our broken hearts. He did just that for St. Joseph, why wouldn't He do the same for us?

My brothers and sisters, I welcome your comments and questions. Do you have a story or testimony about a resounding "Yes!" in your life... how it brought you closer to The Presence? What's on your mind...let's talk about it! Call 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: A thousand thanks for your wonderful calls and emails. It is always edifying to speak with you!

Do you want to become a "heavenly" person? Fr. John Tauler, a German Dominican, popular preacher and mystical theologian who died in 1361, offered some counsel about how to do that. Our December *Magnificat* quotes him:

> In two ways we should become like God -- in the practice of obedience after our Savior's example, who obeyed his heavenly Father even unto death, and by growth and perseverance in that virtue and in all others. Thus do we become heavenly [people]; thus are we made one spirit with God through deep humility, by entire yielding up of self, by patience full of sweetness, by poverty of spirit and by warmth of charity. All who do this... shall triumph over their foes. God

> will free them from the heavy burdens which weigh them down and help them in bearing the trials, many and painful, which he sends; for he sends trials in order that men entering within themselves may consider the reasons of these trials, so that being, as it were, thrown back on themselves by suffering, they may be kept in a state of recollection.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be God and may He profusely bless you! Bye for now!