

R.S.V.P. (Responding To God's Call)

We have all been given an envelope with an invitation R.S.V.P. (please reply) from the Lord. He has invited us to come to him and to respond to his plan for our lives. He wants us to say "Yes."

After Peter, Isaiah, Moses and Mary encountered God they responded in similar, positive ways. All said "Yes." Isaiah said, "Here I am Lord, send me!" Peter left his boat, his nets and even his parents and followed Jesus. Luke highlights Peter's thorough response by saying, "They left everything and followed Jesus." (Luke 5:11). The invitation by Jesus was met by an instantaneous, radical, total "Yes" on the part of Peter and his friends.

The Virgin Mary also had her encounter with the divine in the form of the Angel Gabriel. Like the others she became afraid and was invited to surrender by bearing God's son. In words that have become the object of poetry, song and sermons her famous response was, "Behold I am the handmade of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38). Could Mary have possibly known at her "fiat" the suffering that this "Yes" would entail? The horrible prophecy of Simeon cast light on the cost of any "Yes" to God. "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." (Luke 2:35).

The statue of the Pieta in St. Peter's Basilica, is a captivatingly beautiful statue of Mary holding the dead Jesus cradled in her lap. It freezes in time the moment when the body of the Son of God was lowered from the Cross and given to his mother. The statue by Michelangelo captures that moment, how right and just it is that this moment not be lost. The sacrifice of Jesus and the suffering of Mary are captured for all time. God has honored Mary's "Yes" in this portrayal. Reflect on how expensive any "Yes" to God can be. The Pieta shows us that no commitment, no matter our vocation in life, is easy.

I Die Daily (1 Corinthians 15:31)

Death is the final surrender of many surrenders to God. If we continue to say "Yes" to God consistently with our lives, our final "Yes" will be at the moment of our death. Our death will not be happenstance, but a precious return to God. (Psalm 116:15). Instead of our life being wrenched from us, we will be yielding it back to God.

Paul the Apostle wrote about "dying daily." Dying, for him, meant exercising self-control and suffering for the Gospel. He was speaking about the crucifixion of the flesh and surrendering his will to God each day. He wrote about self-sacrifice, determination and discipline. We must understand that surrender is first of all an act of the will. It is a choice that makes us rise above our feelings. As we do it over and over, day after day, it becomes an attitude. Then, when we consistently abandon ourselves to God and his will for our lives, it becomes a lifestyle.

In order to live well, we must be surrendering our wills and our energies to God each day. Mark writes in his Gospel, "If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." (Mark 8:34). Luke put it well when he nuanced Mark's earlier version by adding one word, "daily." "Take up your cross daily." (Luke 9:23). In other words, Luke is plainly revealing that surrendering yourself to the demands of discipleship is not a one time or even a once a week affair. Christianity is a lifestyle of self-denial and constant surrender. The opportunities to surrender are endless. The call we have is to say "Yes" one day at a time, all the time.

What does surrender mean in practical terms? Surrender happens when you watch less T.V. and spend more time in prayer. It is admitting that you are wrong sometimes and saying you are sorry. Abandonment means service, forgiveness and generosity. Yielding to God's will means allowing God to have your thoughts and imaginations. We must also yield our emotions to God. Surrender implies acknowledging God in all our decisions. Morally it means submitting our eyes, ears and mouth to God. It is obedience and submission to the authority in our life (God). Giving God our time and energies is a great way to surrender. A disciple must be willing to suffer for Jesus. We must be bold enough to risk rejection by speaking about Jesus. Surrender means sacrifice. There are endless areas where we must die to self so that Jesus can be all that we are. In the words of John the Baptist, "He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:30).

Christianity is a total 24/7 commitment. It is **Not** going to church just once a week. It is a daily, hourly, and sometimes, even an every moment of the day occurrence of saying "Yes" to God.

True freedom comes through our commitment. If you are not committed to something in your life, you are drifting and never really settled within or without. Many in our society and culture today are afraid of commitment, fearing the perceived loss of freedom.

There are multitudes of people today who are hungry and thirsty for God. People want to know about God! Many desire to be committed to Jesus in a deeper way. Scores are going to Bible studies, attending retreats, coming to missions, and reading good spiritual books. Young people everywhere are seeking the truth. They want to reach out to other people and have meaning in their lives. People are tired of being tricked by the world and are seeking the **Word** instead. Many are getting involved at church and in other ways to help people. People are discovering that Christianity was never meant to be a private thing. Following Jesus means losing your life for others, and thus finding life.

What does surrendering to God daily mean for you? Could it mean spending more time in prayer? Is God calling you to read the Bible more? Possibly it means abandoning control of your life to God. Can you step out of the boat as Peter did to get involved in church activities? Do you believe that God will use you to visit shut-ins or those in the hospital? Is there some idol you need to leave behind so that you can go forward?

God's R.S.V.P. is an invitation for you to draw near and surrender to him. He is calling you to salvation and to surrender yourself at the Cross. Some he is calling to religious life, others to live their marriage vows faithfully, while others are called to be single for the Lord. All of us are being called to a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus. As God has said so many times in the Bible, "Don't be afraid." It is your decision if you wish to live for Jesus in a quality way. If you "die to self" daily, your real self will live on, even after the day we die. When you surrender to God now you will find that the hour of your death will simply be the final "Yes" flowing from a lifetime of surrenders.

