

LENTEN READER

YEAR C





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THE TWENTIETH DAY OF LENT

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34 • 1 Corinthians 9:1-15 • Mark 6:30-46 • Psalm 83

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." -Luke 1:38

Marina Gross-Hoy is a writer and Museum Studies PhD candidate in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. Originally from Michigan, Marina moved to Paris to complete a master's in muséologie at the École du Louvre. After several years in France, she moved back to North America for a PhD program at the Université de Québec à Montréal, focusing on how museums develop digital projects to create engaging experiences for visitors. When museums closed during the pandemic, Marina became curious about what it would mean to look at daily life with the same attention we use when looking at art in a museum. She explores these ideas in her newsletter (marinagrosshoy.com/newsletter), where she shares simple practices for looking at life like a work of art.

I was in Rome and there was Michelangelo's Pietà, that famous marble sculpture of Mary holding Jesus's crucified body in her lap. I had seen the statue years before and had been unmoved—it felt distant, small, unimpressive in Saint Peter's grand interior.

But my eyes were different this visit. In museum after museum, I had been searching out the portraits of Mary holding her baby, a prime subject for Italian Renaissance painters. My husband and I were talking about a baby, and I was using this trip across Italy to glean some insights into the journey I was about to begin. Some paintings looked like the artist had never seen a baby in real life, others were so tender it felt like love was mixed in the paint.

I studied Mary's face in each iteration of the Virgin and Child, wondering: what does it mean to become a mother?

In Florence, I had stood in front of Fra Angelico's fresco of the Annunciation, a scene of sublime calm, painted in warm Tuscan yellows and soothing royal blues. The painting depicts the moment where Mary opens herself to the Divine incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us, God in her. I had dreamily asked myself, what will my "yes" to my calling look like?

But here, in front of the Pietà, the contrast felt violent. This was a distorted version of the Virgin and Child. Mary's boy is limp in her lap. She looks down at that same body that had gestated in her womb, that she had cleaned and fed and kept safe. And now, that beloved head falls back at an unnatural angle. Mary's face is almost impassive, except those eyes which she can barely open all the way to the grief lying still in her lap.

Mary's "yes" to God led to her deepest sorrow.

Standing there, in the midst of the crowds flowing through Saint Peter's, I understood for the first time that the agony of the Crucifixion was not only contained in Jesus's pain. It was also found in the waves left by his absence. The waves of grief that came from sitting with an impossible loss. The waves of despair that came from answering one's divine calling and being confronted with a terrible twist in the story.

And the waves of being impacted by this Love—that flows through the despair of death to the glory of Resurrection—ripple out from those people first touched by Jesus. The waves keep reverberating down through the generations, down to all of us today who grapple with opening ourselves to our calling. How do we welcome the vulnerability of love, when there's no guarantee that it won't hurt like hell? How do we open ourselves to the risks of faith, with only a promise that we can trust the storyteller?

"Here am I", Mary said. Let it be.

Reflection by Marina Gross-Hoy