

The Annunciation of the Lord

A passage from *The Velveteen Rabbit* about being more real:

'Does it hurt?' asked the Rabbit. 'Sometimes', said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. 'When you are Real you don't mind being hurt. 'Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,' he asked, 'or bit by bit?' 'It doesn't happen all at once', said the Skin Horse. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand'.

This is quoted by the late Sr. Mary David in a collection of her writings, largely to novices, as they struggle to adapt to surrendering their will to God, to the loss of autonomy which is so counter-cultural now. It's a loss Ahaz refuses to make and he becomes less Real as a result. He's refused the promise of God's help for the lesser help of other human beings – of Assyria. Mary is faced with a similar loss of autonomy: of having a child outside marriage and not by the will of her betrothed. It could seem like a betrayal, a loss rather than a gain. So like the Cross. But Mary's 'yes' becomes God's 'yes' to us, and our way to becoming Real, *despite*, and perhaps *because*, of all appearances to the contrary. We tend to keep Mary's image immaculate, despite her suffering and, in a sense, perhaps, that's right as we realise that *once you are Real you can't be ugly*.

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