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St. Maria Goretti Scholarship Essay

SPDCCW

How can I say yes, as the Blessed Mother said yes?

*Fiat.* To Christians that word is most familiar in the context of the Gospels, when Mary said it in response to the angel's declaration. For such a short word it has a lot of meaning. *Fiat*, meaning "let it be done," or to us, "yes."

It took tremendous courage for Mary to give a willing acceptance to be the Mother of God. In my own life I find that the amount of strength it takes to say "yes" to God is sometimes unbelievably hard to summon. My will is unwieldy and my intellect is not always strong enough to combat it. However, all it takes is that one simple word, *fiat*, and I can choose to let God's grace grow in my life.

There is a program out in the world called Exodus 90, which gives men guidelines to follow along the 90 days before Easter to grow in their spiritual life. About four years ago I watched my father participate in the program and wondered if there was one for women that also focused on the pillars of prayer, asceticism, and fraternity. I did some research and found out about the Fiat 90 program. As I mentioned, it was a few years ago, and there were different sources with information on Fiat 90, but no clear one that I could go to, especially as a young woman in high school. So, in 2020, I cobbled together some guidelines loosely based off of the Exodus ones, and attempted to complete the 90 days.

No one quite tells us, especially as young women, what it means to say “yes” to God, or how hard it is. That first Fiat 90 I did was very hard indeed. The guidelines had rules about prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, as well as other asceticisms like working out regularly and fasting from TV and social media. It forced me to change my life and the habits I had, and really made me evaluate how much I was willing to give to God. When Easter came around, that was the question I had been seriously considering, and I realized I wanted to serve Him as best as I could, and give Him my own *fiat*.

Throughout my first Fiat 90, the one thing I realized I was missing was community and accountability. My mom encouraged me to get a group of girls from our church together to participate. That next year my first official Fiat 90 group started with 7 other young women joining. I hosted weekly Zoom meetings where we would discuss the Fruits of the Holy Spirit - one for every week of Fiat. The guidelines were just as difficult as they had been the year before, but somehow that knowledge was easier realizing that I was not in the struggle for holiness alone. Looking back on it, I can better see the Blessed Mother’s influence during that time in shaping my character and my willingness to follow God.

Something I can very much attribute to her intercession would be how much the Fiat 90 program grew within those next two years. This year, 33 other girls decided to take a leap of faith and join me on this journey towards Easter and holiness. It is 13 weeks of submitting our wills to our intellects and doing our best to form ourselves into true daughters of God. Like Mary’s fiat, it requires sacrifice from all of us. Habits are not formed overnight, and good habits need a lot of time to be built up and solidified in one’s soul. Every single young woman in the group has made her own personal *fiat* to God, and sacrificed something to follow Him in Mary’s footsteps. I struggle with a different guideline every year, and the time commitment to leading

the meetings and binding the community together is not always easy. It is in the struggle when I can look at an aspect of Mary's life that inspires me, and that is when she meets Jesus on the road to Calvary. Knowing that she was able to hold on to her joy and love for God even in the midst of such suffering is inspiring.

The road to holiness is not easy, but as I have told the young women in Fiat, saying "yes" is the first and hardest step. I hope, through Mary's intercession, that I can continue to give God my own *fiat*, and to inspire others to do the same.