

## **March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020: The Annunciation of the Lord**

First Reading: Isaiah 7.10-14; 8.10d

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 40.6, 7-8, 9, 10 (R. 7-8)

Second Reading: Hebrews 10.4-10

Gospel: Luke 1.26-38

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

Today our Lenten journey is punctuated by a truly wondrous Feast, that is, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. This momentous event has been described as “[t]he most important conversation in history....It was a conversation between God himself, through the ministry of an Archangel, and a [v]irgin named Mary, from the house of David, espoused to a craftsman named Joseph” (see: <https://opusdei.org/en-ca/article/life-of-mary-v-the-annunciation/>).

As we read in today’s Gospel reading from Luke, the Archangel Gabriel did not “beat around the bush” when meeting with Mary but got “right to the point.” For instance, when greeting Mary, Gabriel says “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you” (1:28).

Gabriel’s reference to Mary as being “full of grace” is very meaningful! It reveals that God has already “graced” Mary prior to their meeting, as she is one who “has been” and “still is” completely “covered” with God’s saving love. This undoubtedly points to Mary’s Immaculate Conception, our glorious belief that God sanctified Mary at the moment of her conception and preserved her from original sin and that tendency to fall into sin like the rest of humanity (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, p. 105).

Now Mary was justifiably puzzled over Gabriel’s greeting but the Archangel tells her to relax and not to worry, as she “will conceive...and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High....He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:30-33).

So, there it is – the “heart” of this majestic dialogue between Gabriel and Mary. Mary has found out that she is going to give birth to Jesus Christ – true God and true man and the Savior of the world! And just like that, Mary’s life has changed for eternity!

Understandably, Mary did not fully comprehend all that Gabriel had told her but the Archangel advises her that the Holy Spirit will come down upon her and that her child Jesus will be called the Son of God. What’s more, Mary is told her relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son – John the Baptist, although she was considered unable to have a child. But, as Gabriel says, nothing is impossible for God (1:34-37)!

After receiving this news, Mary demonstrates her genuine closeness to God. She says to Gabriel, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (1:38). This is not a mere passive acceptance on Mary’s part for she sincerely desires to do God’s will. In other words, Mary freely and actively says “yes” to God’s calling of her to give birth to Jesus. In our modern-day language, her response to Gabriel could be interpreted as roughly along the lines of “Sounds good. I am ready to do God’s will. Bring it on!” (See Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, pp. 105-106.)

From there something most interesting occurs. Although it is not included in today’s reading, Luke explains that following her conversation with Gabriel, Mary went “with haste to a Judean town in the hill country” so that she could be with her relative Elizabeth (1:39-40).

Needless to say, the Holy Spirit was also working powerfully in Elizabeth’s life and she exclaims to Mary “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:41b-43). And soon thereafter, Mary began praising God for all of His blessings: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” (1:46b-47).

What a wonderful event Luke is describing for us! Here are two very holy women, both filled with the Holy Spirit, coming together as sisters in the Lord to praise and worship the loving Creator of the universe! And this was something of a prolonged visit, as Luke tells us that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about 3 months before returning home (1:56).

It seems so fitting, so natural, that Mary and Elizabeth spent time with each other worshipping God and glorifying Him through their lives. Furthermore, it is a practice that we are used to imitating - whether we realize it or not, as we are accustomed to coming together to praise God at Mass and to serve Him in various parish and community-based ministries. And yet this blessed practice of coming together to praise and serve the Lord is seemingly “cut off” from us now with the current instruction to practice “social distancing” and to “stay home.” Or is it?

Many health care leaders are stating it is better to use the term “physical distancing” than “social distancing” because even though we are being told to stay apart physically, technology (e.g., phone, Skype, Facebook, e-mail, etc.) allows us to “stay connected” with family and friends (see: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/why-health-officials-say-physical-distancing-is-a-better-term-than-social-distancing-1.4863344>).

Indeed, we are connected through technology and this helps us retain and even strengthen our important social ties. But, more importantly, as baptized Catholic-Christians we are connected to God and each other by virtue of our baptism and our faith lives. As St. Paul reminds us, “so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another” (Rom 12:5).

These words by Paul are truly profound. Given that we are spiritually “parts of one another” there is much to gain from praying *with* each other (and technology allows us to do this even if we are not physically close to one another) and *for* each other. Praying for those in our parish communities, offering up our joys and struggles for one another, and practicing our Lenten sacrifices for one another’s benefit are all

wonderful ways to glorify God through our lives and to “deepen our connection” with Him and each other.

And when we consider how we are “parts of one another” in Christ it is vital that we cultivate our relationship with those blessed souls who have passed over to eternity and are with God. Our Church’s longstanding tradition of venerating the saints and asking for their powerful intercession marvelously exemplifies just how spiritually interconnected we are through Jesus (see Symbolon Series: Mary and the Saints).

Of all the saints there is none greater than the Blessed Virgin Mary, for by virtue of her being Queen of Heaven and of Earth she is also Queen of all the Saints! When, as we read today, Gabriel addresses Mary as “Hail, full of grace”, we know this helps form the basis of the beautiful “Hail Mary” prayer whereby we ask the Mother of God to pray for us.

And the part of that prayer in which we say “...and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus” is truly awesome, for it is here that we join with Mary and many others, both in heaven and on earth, in praising and adoring Our Lord. This is an amazingly “high-level” form of spiritual interconnectedness!

We know that these days of “physically distancing” from one another are challenging but it can also be a time of tremendous grace if we focus on partaking in God’s never-ending mercy and love. So, let us deepen our union with the Lord and nourish our spiritual interconnectedness through prayer and self-offerings to God. By doing this we will profoundly experience the power of Holy Spirit and we will be strengthened in our belief that nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible for God!