

## HOMILY FOR DAILY MASS (Solemnity of the Annunciation)

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day

Part Two: reflection on the readings

Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

### PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Lectionary: 545

#### Reading 1 [IS 7:10-14; 8:10](#)

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The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying:

Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God;

let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky!

But Ahaz answered,

“I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!”

Then Isaiah said:

Listen, O house of David!

Is it not enough for you to weary people,

must you also weary my God?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign:

the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son,

and shall name him Emmanuel,

which means “God is with us!”

#### Responsorial Psalm [40:7-8A, 8B-9, 10, 11](#)

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R. (8a and 9a) **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.**

Sacrifice or oblation you wished not,

but ears open to obedience you gave me.

Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not;

then said I, “Behold I come.”

R. **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.**

“In the written scroll it is prescribed for me,

To do your will, O my God, is my delight,

and your law is within my heart!”

R. **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.**

I announced your justice in the vast assembly;  
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

R. **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.**

Your justice I kept not hid within my heart;  
your faithfulness and your salvation I have spoken of;  
I have made no secret of your kindness and your truth  
in the vast assembly.

R. **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.**

## **Reading 2** [HEB 10:4-10](#)

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Brothers and sisters:

It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats  
take away sins.

For this reason, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
in holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight.  
Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll,  
behold, I come to do your will, O God.’”

First he says, “Sacrifices and offerings,  
holocausts and sin offerings,  
you neither desired nor delighted in.”  
These are offered according to the law.  
Then he says, “Behold, I come to do your will.”  
He takes away the first to establish the second.  
By this “will,” we have been consecrated  
through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## **Verse Before The Gospel** [JN 1:14AB](#)

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The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us;  
and we saw his glory.

## **Gospel** [LK 1:26-38](#)

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The angel Gabriel was sent from God  
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,

to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,  
of the house of David,  
and the virgin's name was Mary.  
And coming to her, he said,  
"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."  
But she was greatly troubled at what was said  
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.  
Then the angel said to her,  
"Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God.  
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall name him Jesus.  
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,  
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,  
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his Kingdom there will be no end."  
But Mary said to the angel,  
"How can this be,  
since I have no relations with a man?"  
And the angel said to her in reply,  
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.  
Therefore the child to be born  
will be called holy, the Son of God.  
And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,  
has also conceived a son in her old age,  
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;  
for nothing will be impossible for God."  
Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word."  
Then the angel departed from her.

## **PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS**

We are celebrating the Solemnity of the Annunciation today. After the Crucifixion of the Lord, the Annunciation is the most common theme in Western Christian art (check this out with our art historian, Theresa Martinelli, to be sure). This Solemnity goes back to about the year 500 AD.

Some of you will remember the presentation I gave on the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris a while ago. During this presentation, I mentioned the flowering of devotion to the Blessed Virgin starting in Western Europe about 1000 AD. This is the time when the Church began to build the great gothic cathedrals, like Chartres, Rouen, Cologne, Saint Deny and, of course, Notre Dame de Paris. One of the great movers-and-shakers in this flourishing of devotion to the Blessed Virgin

was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 AD), whose homilies on Mary display an enormously fertile devotional imagination in regard to the Blessed Virgin.

For our celebration of the Annunciation, I am providing you with a beautiful homily on the Annunciation preached by Saint Bernard. The saint is preaching on the Gospel reading for today's mass. Bernard focuses on the importance of Mary's response to the Archangel Gabriel who has just announced that she has been chosen to conceive and bear the Redeemer. Check out the text: Mary's first response to Gabriel's annunciation is fear. After a moment of silence, Mary says, "let it be done to me according to your word" (the Latin is beautiful: *fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*).

The Blessed Virgin's simple act of obedience can be placed next to the obedience of Abraham, the father of faith, who set out with God into the desert in an act of obedience to God's command. And both Mary and Abraham, as models of the obedience of faith, are anticipations of the Great Obedience, which is Christ's death on the cross. Even as we celebrate the Annunciation, we are being propelled by the season of Lent to the mysteries of Good Friday, the cross, the tomb and, of course, the mystery of our redemption on Easter Sunday. The obedience of Abraham and Mary's *fiat* are both rooted in the Great Obedience of Christ who was "obedient to death, even death on a cross" (as St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians).

HOMILY BY SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX:

**Y**ou have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us.

The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life.

Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word.

Why do you delay, why are you afraid? Believe, give praise, and receive. Let humility be bold, let modesty be confident. This is no time for virginal simplicity to forget prudence.

In this matter alone, O prudent Virgin, do not fear to be presumptuous. Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more necessary. Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open. Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, she says, be it done to me according to your word.*

[Homily in Praise of the Virgin Mother, 4:8-9, *Opera omnia, Edit. Cisterc.* 4:53-54.]

### **PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA***

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* (“divine reading”). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as “a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys”). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don’t rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually “reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the reflection on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?