

4 Advent B SML 2020  
LK 1:26-38

Our Blessed Mother is a woman of many accomplishments, many firsts:

- ✓ Mary is the “first disciple,” the first one to receive the Word of God, who is Jesus.
- ✓ While Gabriel is the first angel, Mary is the first person to announce the good news of the Messiah’s coming birth – to her cousin Elizabeth.
- ✓ Similarly, in Mary’s Magnificat, she is the first prophetic voice in the New Testament; her Magnificat - that magnificent combination of speech, poetry, prose, and fact, showing deep emotion and strong conviction and making excessive use of the Law in Deuteronomy, the Prophets Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah and the books of Jewish History, especially 1 and 2 Samuel.
- ✓ Mary was a woman of deep prayer, a contemplative of sorts, who “treasured all these things in her heart,” as the Gospel of Luke puts it more than once.
- ✓ Mary was resourceful, who bore a son at an early age, fled with her family to Egypt, raised her son in difficulty, and learned to live with surprise, uncertainty and mystery
- ✓ Mary was able to do all this because of her faith.

Yet for most of us, myself included, the Gospel story of the Annunciation that, every time it is heard, sends a chill up the believer’s spine. We never get tired of hearing it.

And, we never tire of looking at the beautiful works of artists all over the world, through time and memorial, as the Annunciation is the most popular subject of artistic renderings—especially in medieval and Renaissance Europe: paintings, sculptures, mosaics, frescoes and stained glass windows. Just picture our stained glass windows above the altar, depicting the Angel Gabriel in one triangle, and Our Blessed Lady in the other. Gorgeous!

That is because what happened at the Annunciation, namely, the Incarnation, that pivotal moment in the history of salvation, when God came to earth and literally became one of us – happened when God greeted a simple girl, in her small home, in an obscure town.

The Gospel story of the Annunciation draws us in because Mary wonderfully exemplifies the role of any real-life believer, any one of us who is willing to let go and let God. This story offers us a summary of the spiritual life.

The initiative lies entirely with God. It is God, through the archangel Gabriel, who begins the dialogue with Mary, just as God does in our lives. God speaks to us, and often in very unexpected ways, to experience a sideswipe that we “know not what,” a sideswipe:

- ✓ of something completely out of our control,
- ✓ of something transcendent,
- ✓ something good or bad,
- ✓ a blessing or a crisis.

Like Mary, our response is fear. It's:

- ✓ either too good to be true,
- ✓ there must be some mistake,
- ✓ something we fear won't last,
- ✓ or something we fear because it's bigger than us.

Yet God's response to Mary is one we hear over and again in the Gospel, "Do not be afraid."

- ✓ When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he said to him, "**Do not be afraid**, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John." (LK 1:13)
- ✓ When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said to her, "**Do not be afraid**, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You shall conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. (LK 1:30)
- ✓ When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Joseph in a dream, he said to him, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her." (MT 1:20)
- ✓ When the Archangel Gabriel and the heavenly host appeared to the shepherds, he said to them, "**Do not be**

**afraid**; for behold I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today, in the city of David, a savior has been born for you, who is Messiah and Lord.” (LK 2:10)

These words were also spoken by the Archangel Gabriel at the Resurrection:

- ✓ The angel said to the women, “**Do not be afraid!** I know you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. (MT 28:5)

And six times when He was preaching and teaching, Our Blessed Lord himself gave the same clarion call, “**Do not be afraid.**” “**Do not be afraid**” is found 365 times in the scriptures, once for every day of the year. Do not be afraid!

To prove God’s providence, God points to signs of promise already fulfilled. Gabriel pointed to Mary’s cousin. “Elizabeth your cousin has conceived a son in her old age. She who was thought to be barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible with God.”

How many times do those who come to me for advice, doubt that God is a part of the sideswipe they are going through. Every moment comes to you pregnant with a divine purpose. Our Lord is so powerful, He can use any sideswipe for His purposes, His greater good.

One thing I can say without any hesitation is, “We are people of faith. No matter what it is, no matter what “this” is, God will always give you the grace.” Hasn’t that always been the case for people of faith? Because when you’re going through the sideswipe, you don’t see God, but when you look back, you say, “Yes. There was God.” You all know I suffered from depression, and when I was going through it, I didn’t see Him. It was dark. But now? Now, I can look back at my months and months of depression, and see those times when God was right there with me. In the midst of the sideswipe, you can’t see God, you can’t feel God. It is as if, as the story of the Annunciation ends, “With that, the angel left her.”

Isn’t that the way it is with us? After an encounter with God, however they happen in our lives - blessing or crisis or sideswipe or call it what you will, we feel we are left alone to carry out what we are asked to do. Though God is still with us, frequently it seems we are alone. In the months that followed, who knows if Mary ever encountered God as deeply as she did at the Annunciation, until of course, she laid eyes on the very face of God held in hands, the very face of God in the Christ Child? And that’s the hardest part: trusting in God as did Mary, the part that’s called faith.

I'll close this homily with a reflection I read this/yesterday morning from my daily devotional. The reflection is written as God is speaking:

Never let yourselves fear anybody or anything. No fear of My failing you. No fear that your faith will fail you. No fear of poverty or loneliness. No fear of not knowing the way. No fear of others. No fear of their misunderstanding. But, My children, this absolute casting out of fear is the result of a Perfect Love, a perfect Love of Me and My Father. Speak to Me about everything. Listen to Me at all times. Feel My tender nearness, substituting at once some thought of Me for the fear.

The powers of evil watch you as a besieging force would watch a guarded city — the object being always to find some weak spot, attack that, and so gain an entrance. So evil lurks around you, and seeks to surprise you in some fear.

The fear may have been but a small one, but it affords evil a weak spot of attack and entrance, and then in some rushing despondency, doubt of Me, and so many other sins. Pray, My beloved children, for that Perfect Love of Me that indeed casts out all fear.