

Christmas Homily 2020 SML LK 2:1-14

We have all had one of those dreams, correction, one of those nightmares, when:

- ✓ You're screaming for help but no sound will come out of your mouth
- ✓ You're trying to run as fast as you can, but your legs won't move
- ✓ You're walking into class only to find out there is an exam that you did not study for
- ✓ You've messed up big time at work and you're getting fired, and who is firing you but your Mother.

I had a dream that I messed up royally, right here at St. Mary of the Lakes, and my dream did not even give me the courtesy of knowing what I did. Life as I knew it was about to end for me at St. Mary of the Lakes, and who was calling me on the carpet, but my Mother, who in real life, has long since gone to God. Now this was not just a dream. This was one of those "scared to death" nightmares that when I woke up, the sheets were soaked with sweat and the covers were all over the place. My cats Tux and Chad, who normally hog all the covers, were nowhere to be found, so obviously I was not fit to sleep

with that night. I woke up, my heart was pounding, and I said, “Thanks be to God it was just a dream.”

Some of what I preached this past Sunday bears repeating given the number of persons who told me that homily really helped.

The words of the Archangel Gabriel, spoken to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation are the clarion call of hope for many this Christmas. “Do not be afraid . . . for nothing is impossible with God.” In fact, each time Gabriel brought a message of hope at the birth of Christ, the Archangel began with the words: “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)

Six times while preaching and teaching, Our Blessed Lord Himself gave the same clarion call, "Do not be afraid." In fact, in the Bible, the words "Do not be afraid" appear 365 times, one for each day of the year, and that's no coincidence. God's message is clear. Regardless of your "this," our "this:"

- ✓ The pandemic
- ✓ The economy
- ✓ The election
- ✓ The test results
- ✓ The phone call
- ✓ The "this"

Do not be afraid. God has it. God has your "this" and He has my "this."

A timely message for Mary and Joseph, as what was required of them was not one of those “scared to death” nightmares, it was real. It was a nightmare from which they could not wake:

1. As the Archangel Gabriel was announcing to Mary, and then to Joseph, that she was to give birth to the Messiah, I am quite sure Mary and Joseph were adding things up in their heads that according the book of Deuteronomy (23:23), Mary would be stoned to death when her pregnancy becomes known. What a nightmare! What a mess!
2. When Caesar Augustus ordered the census to be taken, Mary and Joseph realized they would be traveling in her ninth month of pregnancy 11 plus miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. What a nightmare! What a mess!
3. And when there was no room at the inn, Mary and Joseph were given a cave as a place where the child would be born. What a nightmare! What a mess!
4. And when Joseph received a warning in a dream to take the child and his mother and depart for Egypt for Herod put a contract out on Jesus. What a nightmare! What a mess!

As believers we tend to glorify the events that surrounded the birth of the Christ Child:

- ✓ The first grade Christmas pageants make the 11 miles long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem a 3 second stroll across the stage

- ✓ The beautiful stained-glass windows of gorgeous scenes of the crèche portraying Mary and Joseph dressed in pristine Sunday best
- ✓ The Christmas altars with trees and lights and candles
- ✓ musical arrangements that softly roll off our tongues

It could bring tears to the eyes. Any tears that welled in the eyes of Mary and Joseph were tears of a resounding “This is so hard.” What surrounded the birth of the Christ Child was one big mess, one nightmare after another. But living the nightmare was worth it.

From tears of “this is so hard” to tears of adoration, as their newborn Son, whom they held in their arms, would one day offer hope to the infinite, and from the very mouth of God, Our Blessed Lord would teach us how to “not be afraid.”

I read a story about an abbot who used to speak frequently to his monks about finding God and feeling God, especially in “the midst of a nightmare, in the midst of a mess.” One of his monks asked the abbot if he had ever encountered God when life was low and anxiety was high. After a bit of embarrassed silence, the abbot admitted that he had never had a direct experience of God. Yet he said there was nothing surprising about that. God himself had said to Moses in Exodus 33:

My face you cannot see. When my glory passes, I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen. (33:20-23)

While the abbot said he never had a direct experience of God, he did say that over his many days, the abbot could very clearly see “God’s back.” More often than not, God is more easily found by simply looking back over your life, and saying, “Yes, there was God.” Yes, there was God. Yes, there was God.

For many, 2020 was a nightmare. It was a mess. It still is a mess. The vaccine is dawning for a few, and on the horizon for the rest of us, but it’s been a real mess. Death tolls are at an all-time high. 2020 has the highest number of deaths in US history. And if the conspiracy theories are correct, we have more than a virus on our hands. There is a real lack of truth regardless of which direction you look.

Regardless, regardless. Regardless of all that 2020 brought, regardless of your “this” or my “this,” we must believe the words spoken over and over again by the Archangel Gabriel. Do not be afraid. And why is Gabriel an archangel? Angels are messengers. Archangels are messengers with words of extreme importance. That’s why Gabriel is an

archangel. It is extremely important for us to hear and understand his message. Do not be afraid . . . of anything.

I would need to ask the abbot, “What about Holy Communion? God in your hand, God in your heart?”

The message this Christmas night (morning) is “Do not be afraid” and the gift this Christmas night (morning) is one of hope, hope in God who loved us so much He became man, with all the “tears of this is so hard” that were required of Mary and Joseph, so that better and more blessed than a monk, better and more blessed than Moses, who only saw God’s back, we can see God’s face. 2020 years ago and for 33 years following, they beheld God’s face in the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, and for almost 2000 years since, we behold God’s face in the Blessed Sacrament, in just a few minutes, Holy Communion: God in your hand, God in your heart.

2020 years ago, there was no room for the Christ Child at the inn. And no one took note of His birth, other than Mary, Joseph, a few shepherds and three kings.

So tonight/this morning after the Mass, when you stop by the creche and tuck a piece of straw in your pocket or your purse, look up. Look up to the tabernacle and see God’s face

in the Blessed Sacrament, in Holy Communion, God in your hand, God in your heart. And this is not just a Christmas present, or just a Christmas presence, but a 24/7/365 presence, an “I will be with you always” presence, good reason to never, ever be afraid.