



Immaculate Conception Church

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*To build a loving community of disciples of Jesus Christ,
Growing in our faith and spirituality,
And making more disciples by serving others.*

March 24, 2020
The Eve of the Feast of the Annunciation

"Socially Distant, Spiritually Connected"

Dear Parish Family of the Immaculate Conception:

On the Eve of the Feast of the Annunciation I wanted to communicate with you and offer words of encouragement and hope as we continue to journey forth socially distanced, yet we remain spiritually connected to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother and to one another as we are all sisters and brothers in the Lord.

As I was reflecting upon tomorrow's gospel from Luke for the Feast of the Annunciation in light of current events I found myself suddenly thanking the Lord for this time of being "'socially distant" – as it would be something that Mary too would experience in her own Journey of Faith to make her "Magnificat", her "Yes", to be the Maidservant of the Lord.

Let's look first at the question of Mary in today's gospel reading '*How can this come about?*' – after all it is a very human one. It is the kind of question that is asked by others in the gospels. When Jesus was with his disciples in the wilderness in the presence of a hungry crowd, they asked him, 'How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?'

When we, with all the world, stand before a situation in our own day which seems beyond our resources to deal with, we each find ourselves asking the same kind of question, 'How can this be?' 'How will I get through this?'

It is a question many people are asking in this time of national and global emergency. The angel Gabriel's answer to this question of Mary (and our question's too) invited her (invite us) to trust not in herself but in God. '*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*'. A lot was being asked of Mary and it would make great demands on her, but she was not being asked to take on this task of being mother to God's Son on the basis of her own resources alone.

With this reassurance, she surrendered to the demanding task that God was giving her, '*Let what you have said be done to me*'. Mary has often been described as a model disciple. We need her example today. In the gospel she models a faith that trusts in God's power and, because it trusts in God's power, stands ready to do what God asks.

The question, 'How can this be?' 'How will I get through this?' can inhibit us, hold us back, but, as in the case of Mary, it can also open us up to the working of the Holy Spirit within us, through us and among us.

Although we cannot be together for this feast at the celebration of the Eucharist I would encourage us to do what Mary, Our Mother invites us to do > **To be Spiritually Connected by: 1) Watching the Celebration of the Mass on EWTN either at 8am, 12noon or 7pm – not just tomorrow but each day; 2) recite the Rosary each day as a Family seeking Mary’s intercession for those afflicted by the Coronavirus; offering prayers / novenas for the multitude of people in the medical profession who are literally on the front lines, risking their own lives, being the hands and voice of Christ; intercessory prayers for medical scientists striving to develop a vaccine so as to save lives and for first responders throughout our Nation and all leaders of Nations who are responding to this crisis. So very much to pray each and every day.**

As I reflect upon being “**spiritually connected**” to you the Parish Family I would like to offer a sincere word of thanks and gratitude to all who responded with much love and affection by partaking in our “**Operation Care Mail**” Campaign for our friends at the Buckingham and Brentwood facilities. The cards, with their drawings and kind words will most definitely encourage each resident and they too will know that we are spiritually connected to them. A very special word of thanks to our young people in our Parish Faith Formation Ministry and to Suzanne and Christina for organizing this form of outreach – of our expression of love and yes – we are in this together.

Lastly, this past Sunday Pope Francis called for all Christians to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic “with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness”, adding, “Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt toward those persons who are the most lonely and tried”.

Speaking after the traditional recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father called on all Christians to join together in prayer. “In these trying days, while humanity trembles due to the threat of the pandemic, I would like to propose to all Christians that together we lift our voices towards Heaven,” he said.

The “Our Father” on the Annunciation

Tomorrow, Wednesday, 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation, he has invited “the Heads of the Churches and the leaders of every Christian community, together with all Christians of the various confessions, to invoke the Almighty, the omnipotent God, to recite at the same time the prayer that Jesus, our Lord, taught us” – the Our Father. “On that day on which many Christians recall the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary of the Incarnation of the Word”, Pope Francis prayed, “may the Lord listen to the united prayer of all of His disciples who are preparing themselves to celebrate the victory of the Risen Christ”.

A special Urbi et Orbi blessing

The Pope also announced that on this Friday, March 27, he will preside over a moment of prayer on the *sagrato* of St Peter’s Basilica, the platform at the top of the steps immediately in front of the façade of the Church. “I invite everyone to participate spiritually through the means of communication”, he said. I am presuming that this will be broadcast on EWTN and I encourage all to participate – it will more than likely be broadcast live

Church grants special indulgence to coronavirus patients and caregivers

The ceremony will consist of readings from the Scriptures, prayers of supplication, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; and will conclude with Pope Francis giving the *Urbi et orbi* Blessing, with the possibility of gaining a plenary indulgence for all those who listen to it live through the various forms of communication. The blessing “to the City [of Rome] and to the World” is normally only given on Christmas and Easter.

The Director of the Holy See Press Office confirmed that the moment of prayer on Friday will be broadcast live from the Vatican, ***beginning at 6 pm Rome time – which is 1pm EST.*** On optimum cable the channel is either 135 or 67. Please check your local directory.

Please know of my continued prayers for you and your family. I miss seeing you and celebrating the Mass with you. Yet, when I celebrate the Mass privately I know that we are spiritually connected as the Body of Christ!

Peace and Blessings,

Fr. Leo