

The Solemnity of the Annunciation

Wednesday 25th March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is 'The Annunciation' a truly great and beautiful solemnity which we keep each year in the Church to remind ourselves of that moment when Our Blessed Lady said 'Yes' to God. Her 'Yes' was not lukewarm or half hearted but a total complete giving and surrendering to God. At this moment in time the upheaval in daily life can be distracting and for some frustrating therefore our saying 'Yes' to God can be a grumble, a whisper, a second thought.

However, God the Holy Spirit always seems to inspire and reveal hope at the right moment. I came across this image of '*The Annunciation*' by Fra Angelico which is in the San Marco museum in Florence. (For those who cannot see it please do visit the parish website)



This Annunciation scene teaches us so much about prayer, hope and God's love in this time of self isolation and social distancing. We see Mary, on her own, humbly sat on a stool within a room surrounded by stone columns. Yet within this

enclosed space the Angel Gabriel, God's messenger appears. No matter where we are and what we are doing God the Father is always with us, no wall, no barrier no human isolation can block out His loving Presence.

Mary seems to be bowing her head towards Gabriel in a sign of respect and welcome. The Virgin is acknowledging God's very presence in her home. How many of us have paused to remind ourselves that God is dwelling within our own homes? How many of us have welcomed Him and acknowledged His presence? Do we have a wall with the crucifix on, a statue of the Sacred Heart or Our Lady, a shelf or other space with a candle lit? These Holy images and objects are not for us to show off how "Catholic" we are but to remind us in a concrete way that God is present in our midst. We acknowledge that fact by giving Him welcome within our home so that in turn it becomes a sacred space and a focal point for prayer.

Outside the room we see a garden and a wild forest behind the wooden fence. It is dark and empty. Within the room where Our Lady and the Angel stand it is full of warm light, the colours are rich and inviting. Our Lady is our second mum who will always reassure and brighten up our life because she is the one who is always pointing to her son - Jesus, Our Lord - who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Why not pick up our rosary beads, and in communion with our Blessed Mother, focus on the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Within these mysteries of the rosary we are able to know the Lord a little more by meditating and reflecting on key episodes in his life. True peace does not come from outside, it is not bought in a shop or found in external amusements. No, true peace is found within when we allow Jesus not only into our homes but also our hearts and give time to speak to him each day.

Finally we see that Our Lady is crossing her arms tenderly about herself. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit because of her welcoming 'Yes' to God, not only into her home but also into her very being. For nine months the Son will grow within her, for nine months she will feel his presence, for nine months she will wait patiently to gaze upon the face of God, a face that not even the great patriarchs and prophets of the past ever had the good fortune to see. At this moment in time people are unable to come to church and sit before the Tabernacle where the true Presence of Our Lord is found in the Eucharistic species, the Blessed Sacrament. However if we look to Mary she shows us that through desire, patient yearning and longing we too will eventually come to gaze upon the Son in his real presence within the Tabernacle and be united in worship at the Altar as a family.

O Holy Mary teach us to welcome your Son Jesus into our homes and our hearts. Help us to make time and space to pray each day. Intercede for us that we may have the grace of patience and when we do return back to church help us have greater awe and devotion for the Lord's true presence in the Tabernacle.

May God Bless you all on this solemnity of the Annunciation. Keep praying. Though Mass is not public know that I will be celebrating it at 12noon in church today.

With my prayers and thoughts

Fr. O'Brien
(Parish Priest)