

+ ANNUNCIATION

March 25, 2022

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very dear sons,

From all eternity God spoke His Word. From the first day of creation, from the beginning of time, God pronounced many words; God announced to angels and men what men and angels needed to know. Even before there were angels or men, God spoke to Himself, saying “Let there be light, let there be a firmament, *fiat lux*” (Gen. 1: 3,6). And the announcements and pronouncements continued down through the centuries. Many were God’s winged messengers bearing Divine tidings to earth; many were His prophets, who walked upon its face, spreading knowledge of the Word of God throughout the world below. But the greatest of these pronouncements, the greatest of annunciations was the one made in the fullness of time to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who thus became the greatest of all the prophets. Such is the theme of today’s feast.

Tragically, Satan too, that “murderer from the beginning”, about whom Christ said that “he stood not in the truth; because truth is not in him...for he is a liar, and the father thereof” (John 8:44), Satan too made his announcements. He too, though not God, but an angel of darkness, found his own collaborators on earth, his prophets. Through a false promise, spoken in the ear of the first woman, he brought about the Fall of the human race, initiating thereby the great series of lies that have kept the human race turning around in an abyss of error, even unto our own day, though no longer, since the coming of Christ, without hope.

Among the first monks, most of whom were hermits, living in the deserts of Egypt and of Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries of our era, one of the greatest spiritual arts, no doubt *the* greatest, was that of *spiritual discernment*, in other words the art of determining whether a given thought or inspiration was from God or from the devil. As these monks learned—to their dismay and confusion—sometimes Satan would disguise himself as an angel of light, promising great things—fame, miraculous gifts and such—in order to make a man lose his vocation and sometimes his faith—even his life. Living alone, sometimes far from spiritual directors, these religious had to discern about many important matters on their own, and they learned to appreciate very highly the gift—for a gift it is—of spiritual discernment.

However challenging may have been spiritual discernment for the early monks, nevertheless, nothing could compare with the discernment Our Lady had to make when an angelic messenger presented himself to her in the intimate confines of her own little house. How did she know that this was truly Saint Gabriel, the “angel of the Lord” that appeared to her?

In truth, as the text of Saint Luke tells us, that Mary was “troubled” at the words of the ambassador, wondering “with herself what manner of salutation this should be” (Luke 1:29). Here was her hour; here was the most difficult spiritual discernment ever made by a human creature. How could she know? The answer is contained in Gabriel’s words to her. What was said to her in the form of an angelic salutation provides the

reason why the Immaculate Virgin's judgment was unerring. The reason is that she was and always is "full of grace" and that the Lord is with her.

For the rest of us, sin has left its fissures in the soul, both in the heart and in the mind. There is always that little margin of moral uncertainty that causes us to hesitate, to be more or less unsure of ourselves. With Mary, on the contrary, there was complete firmness of judgment stemming from her plentiful grace: her soul did not harbor the least duplicity or ambiguity with respect to the light. She was all light.

The Blessed Virgin was not "all light" like *God* is all light. God is light and love and beauty by essence. He possesses, or rather *is* the very act of being in all its fullness—without trying. Every creature, even the most perfect, passes from a certain potential for goodness and truth to having it in a realized way. Mary, although without sin and totally luminous in that sense, nevertheless had to formulate her thoughts. There was a moment of reflection, as with any human person. She still had to discern.

And yet, she entered into the full truth. Because she was "blessed among women", "full of grace", she had an infallible instinct of what God wanted from her. Like us she lived in the faith, not the vision; but unlike us she had an infallible discernment in spiritual matters, owing to her moral perfection and to the integrity of her human nature unharmed by sin. She was truly more enlightened than any of the great doctors of the Church. Her mind was more luminous than that of a Saint Augustine or of a Saint Thomas Aquinas. Her discernment was perfect.

But what about the rest of us? We live in treacherous times. How will we know what to do when difficult problems are presented to us for a timely solution? For the faithful and well-informed Catholic, the basic dogmas of the Church are already settled and require no difficult discernment. Nonetheless, there are many things in life that depend upon circumstances. There are 'contingencies', as we say. A need often arises for an authentic interpretation of the changing conditions of our lives, sometimes even with respect to the teaching of the Church. Where do we turn? To Catholic newspapers and magazines? To the internet?

Saint Benedict, who had the gift of spiritual discernment to an eminent degree, provides an answer. Although it is unfair to transport an historical figure into another age and pretend to know what he or she might say in our day, there is no doubt that the Patriarch of monks gave principles for discernment that do not depend much on circumstances and that are as good today as in his own time, some fifteen centuries ago. His answer is simple but profound; it reflects most remarkably the very attitude of Our Lady and the moment of the Annunciation. You see, it is a matter of humility and of obedience.

By becoming humble a soul gets rid of the noxious fumes of pride and every form of egotism that cloud the mind and heart. Through obedience the light of God is communicated in a very sure—even infallible—manner. This includes, of course, our obedience to legitimate superiors in the Church, when they command us things authoritatively and authentically. The first Pope, Saint Peter states this with great forcefulness, saying, "[W]e have the more firm prophetic word: whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts" (II Petr. 1:19).

When Our Lady said to St. Gabriel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord”, she expressed her humility. When she pronounced her “Be it be done to me according to thy word”, it was her obedience that shone forth.

Today, in union with the Sovereign Pontiff and all the bishops, priests, and faithful in the world, we will make the Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, about which there has been so much discussion in the Church over the past century, stemming from the message Our Lady gave to three children—and through them to the world—at Fatima in 1917. Mary’s prophetic voice resounded at that time and today once again. Even after Pope Saint John Paul II, responding to Our Lady’s request, made his act of entrustment to the Immaculate Heart in 1984, alluding to Russia and her errors at least indirectly, the grace of Fatima continues in the Church. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI during his pontificate on May 13, 2010 stated:

We would be mistaken to think that Fatima’s prophetic mission is complete. Here there takes on new life the plan of God which asks humanity from the beginning: “Where is your brother Abel [...] Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!” (Gen 4:9). Mankind has succeeded in unleashing a cycle of death and terror, but failed in bringing it to an end... In sacred Scripture we often find that God seeks righteous men and women in order to save the city of man and he does the same here, in Fatima, when Our Lady asks: “Do you want to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the sufferings which he will send you, in an act of reparation for the sins by which he is offended and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?” (*Memoirs of Sister Lúcia*, I, 162).

Today the relevance of Russia has come back into the foreground. Our prayer will be that this new Consecration will powerfully help, not only to end the conflict with Russia in Ukraine, but also to rebuild a deep and stable peace in our world based on a spiritual restoration that will raise us out of the mire of sinfulness and reckless social policies that so offend God and wound humanity. Ecce, Fiat. Amen.