

# + ANNUNCIATION

March 25, 2023

Homily pronounced by the Rt. Rev. Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: for the King hath greatly desired thy beauty (Ps. 44)*

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

Is it not rather surprising this feast of the Annunciation, celebrating the event that marks the coming into this world of the Son of God, devotes so much of the liturgy to texts taken from Psalm 44, which is a *nuptial* song? The opening chant or Introit, the Gradual, and the Tract are all drawn from this wonderful and inspired wedding poem. Why? Whose wedding is this? Who is the bride here? Where the groom?

At first glance the facts are disconcerting enough. The Blessed Mary of Nazareth is joined to Saint Joseph on earth in a very real, but unique sort of marriage, one that is entirely virginal. Mary is also said to be the spouse of the Holy Ghost, since it is He who, according to the Archangel Gabriel, was “to come upon” her, when the “power of the Most High would overshadow” her.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is to be her son, not her husband. And yet, the king mentioned in psalm 44 is certainly the Messiah, Christ Our Lord. How can this all make sense? What sort of marriage takes place at the Annunciation?

As is often the case with Holy Scripture, what begins as an apparent contradiction turns out to be the doorway to a greater and more beautiful truth about God. If only we trust the light, if only we persevere in knocking on the door, someone will eventually open and welcome us into the mystery of an immense good, into the warmth and light of our true home that awaits us. God does not deceive us, but He *does* put our faith to the test sometimes, and often enough it is on the threshold of the mystery that He decides to make this examination of our motives.

In fact, there are *the wise*, who have preceded us through this particular door of the Annunciation and who can help us climb the stairs, as it were, and attain the vantage point from which we see more clearly. The Holy Doctors of the Church, as it turns out, have spoken about the Annunciation and this marriage that takes place. They show us how it all has a sense in the light of God’s wisdom and immense love. Saint Augustine, for example, tells that,

The nuptial union is that of “the Word,” and the flesh. The bridal chamber of this union is the Virgin’s womb. For the flesh itself [human nature, flesh and spirit] was united to the Word...The Church was assumed unto Him out of the human race: so that the flesh itself, being united to the Word, might be the head of the Church: and the rest who believe, members of that Head...(Enarr. In Psalm 44).

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<sup>1</sup> Lk. 1:35.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great scholastic theologian, gives us additional insight into how the Annunciation relates to the deeper mystery of the Incarnation, explaining, again in terms of marriage, the particular role the Blessed Virgin Mary played, at the moment when her body became the place for the miracle, the mystical wedding chamber.

[The Annunciation was necessary] he explains, in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it was the Blessed Virgin Mary, speaking on behalf of the whole human race, who said "I do," "Yes," to God's marriage proposal. What a happy answer it was: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word."<sup>3</sup>

But where are we in this great marriage, here in this place, in our day? Despite the many failings and even infidelities of her members, it is the Church, who is, in a larger sense, that glorious bride represented by the Blessed Virgin Mary, a bride "not having spot or wrinkle, or any; such thing; but...holy, and without blemish."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately many of the faithful experience painful difficulties sometimes amid the concrete circumstances in which the Church finds herself. Our American society in general continues to lose its spiritual bearings, as is the case too, sadly for many of the Catholic faithful themselves. In contrast to this beautiful and true vision of things we receive from the mystery of the Annunciation, we are faced in our day with the stark reality of a very different vision, one that is tearing our society and many others apart. There is a new effort of the gates of Hell to prevail over the Church. These grave matters are largely the domain of bishops, but monks must have a say as well. Are monks not like the watchmen of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks:

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.<sup>5</sup>

At a moment of history, when a very important American prelate—indeed, a cardinal of the Catholic Church—has advocated for the ordination of women, even to the priesthood (against the definitive teaching of Pope Saint John Paul II), and called for the admission to Eucharistic communion of those who are actively living a life in blatant contradiction with the holiness of this blessed Sacrament, at such a time we need to remember the great moments of the Gospel. When almost the entire episcopate of the Church in Germany is teaching clearly heretical ideas at the end of their Synodal path, it is time to remember the *Quis Ut Deus* of the great Archangel, but above all the *Ecce-Fiat*, the perfect humility of Our Lady of the Annunciation.

What can we do? His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke, in an interview a few years ago, gave words of encouragement to those who may be troubled.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas, III, q.30, 1, corpus

<sup>3</sup> Lk. 1:38.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 5:27.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 61:6-7, RSV, Catholic edition.

I frequently say to those who are writing to me and are expressing such discouragement, or are asking for direction in what seems to be a very troubled situation, that when, in times like this, there seems to be some confusion in the governance of the Church, then we have, more than ever, to steep ourselves in the Church's constant teaching and to hand that on to our children and to strengthen the understanding of that teaching in our local parishes and our families. Our Lord...didn't tell us that there wouldn't be attacks on the Church, even from within, but He has assured us that the gates of Hell will never prevail over the Church...<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the essential is simply to look higher. When evil or even plain meanness fills our vision along the road, we would do well to seek the light where it is, not upon the ground, but above in the stars. Surely Our Lady of the Annunciation, despite her profound humility, was not staring at the ground before the angelic messenger. She may have had her head bowed, but her soul was already looking heavenward to that holy city Saint John speaks of, "the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."<sup>7</sup> May she, who is the holy Patroness of this abbey, teach us ever to have that upward gaze and her humble confidence in the victory of her Son, the eternal Bridegroom, the eternal Springtime. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> *Rorate Coeli*, 2 March 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Apoc. 21:2.