

**Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent - Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**  
**December 20, 2020**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christmas is now less than a week away, and our scriptures today help us to prepare spiritually for the celebration of this watershed event in salvation history. In particular, the Gospel for today's Mass is that of the Annunciation, by which the angel Gabriel announced that Mary would be the mother of the Redeemer. In response, Mary gave her noble and selfless *fiat*—let it be done—indicating that she would cooperate with her part in the divine plan of salvation. The Blessed Virgin Mary leads us to her Son, Jesus, and we who are adopted sons and daughters of God by virtue of our baptism seek to “join and accompany her, so to speak, as she awaits the birth of her Son.”<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, the Annunciation—the moment at which Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit—took place nine months before Jesus was born, and indeed we celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation every year on March 25<sup>th</sup>. But we read the Gospel of the Annunciation on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent as a

way of recalling the key events that led up to the birth of Our Lord and Savior.

The Blessed Virgin Mary's acceptance of her vocation to be the Mother of God is not simply a passive submission to let something happen to her or in her, but is an active expression of her faith, hope and love.

The angel greets her as "Mary, full of grace." It is almost as if her surname is "full of grace," for that most eloquently and completely describes precisely who she is. Being full of grace, her response to the angel is imbued with the graces of the theological virtues. Her "yes" is an act of faith, for she believes what the angel says to her is true. It is also an act of love, for she cannot refuse to respond in love to the One who calls her in love. Finally, it is an act of hope, because Mary trusts that what the angel says to her will come to fulfillment.

It is this aspect of hope that I wish to highlight today for our spiritual nourishment and inspiration. As the calendar year of 2020 draws to a close in less than two weeks, the challenges and difficulties of the past twelve months—that no one expected as the year began last January—have left many people discouraged. The perfect antidote to discouragement is the virtue of hope.

In his book of daily meditations called, *In Conversation with God*, Father Francis Fernandez wrote:

The ones who become discouraged are not those who undergo difficulties and feel pain. It is those, rather, who do not aspire to sanctity and eternal life, those who despair of ever reaching them, who buckle and give up. The attitude of the former is shaped by a lack of faith, by comfort-seeking, lukewarmness and an excessive attachment to earthly goods, which they consider the only good things worth having. Discouragement, if it is not remedied, paralyses any effort to do good and overcome difficulties. . . .

From the stable at Bethlehem to the moment of His ascension into Heaven, Jesus Christ proclaims a message of hope. Jesus himself is *our only hope* (cf. 1 Tim. 1:1). He is the firm pledge that we will attain to the marvelous future we have been promised. We look towards the cave at Bethlehem *in watchful hope*, understanding that it is only in His company that we can *boldly approach God the Father* (1 Tim. 3:12).

Our Lord himself points out that the principal objects of Christian hope are not the good things of this life which *moth and rust consume, and which thieves can break in and steal* (Matt. 6:19), but the treasures of the incorruptible heritage and, above all, the supreme happiness of the eternal possession of God.

We confidently hope that one day He will give us eternal blessedness, and here and now, pardon for our sins, and His

grace. As a consequence, hope offers to everyone the means necessary to achieve what has been promised.<sup>2</sup>

Our Lady's response at the Annunciation and her example of living in faith, hope and love show us the way to overcome the discouragements of this world and look to the fulfillment of our aspirations for eternal happiness. As St. Alphonsus Liguori said, Mary is "the consolation of the world, ransom of captives, joy of the sick."<sup>3</sup>

During this last week before Christmas, let us look to Mary for her shining example of how to hope in her Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. "She shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of sure hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God."<sup>4</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Antonio Tagle, *Guidelines on the Celebration of Simbang Gabi in the Archdiocese of Manila*, 25 November 2013, §1.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, vol. 1: Advent and Christmastide (London: Scepter, 2012), pp. 151, 153.

<sup>3</sup> St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Visit to the Blessed Sacrament* p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 68.