

**Homily for the Annual Simbang Gabi Novena**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle B  
December 19, 2020**

**Blessed Sacrament Parish  
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this closing Mass of the *Simbang Gabi* Novena in preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

The *Simbang Gabi* Novena is, above all, an expression of our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who leads us to her Son, Jesus. We seek to “join and accompany her, so to speak, as she awaits the birth of her Son.”<sup>1</sup> It is very fitting, therefore, that the Gospel for this Mass is that of the Annunciation, by which the angel Gabriel announced that Mary would be the mother of the Redeemer, to which she gave her noble and selfless *fiat*, indicating that she would cooperate with her part in the divine plan of salvation.

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.