

Thursday March 25th, 2021, the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And what another glorious day we are waking up to!

And it's exactly nine months to Christmas, and how do I know? Because today we are celebrating the Feast of the Annunciation of Our Lord. When the Blessed Virgin Mary said 'yes' to the Angel Gabriel, the Word became Flesh, and dwelt in her womb for nine months. In the new missal the Church describes the Annunciation as the 'prologue' to the mysteries of Holy Week: the incarnation occurred so that we could be redeemed; the child conceived on this day was born to die for our sins and conquer death. Indeed, going through Holy Week it's easy to look back and reflect on the events that took place thirty-three years earlier. We think of Mary meeting Jesus on the road to Calvary, and the prophecy of Simeon that a sword would pierce Mary's heart and the sorrows she would experience. We thank about Jesus being taken down from the cross and placed in the arms of his mother, just as thirty-three years earlier she had held new born son in her arms in the stable of Bethlehem. Because Mary said 'yes' to God she experienced the deepest of sorrows. But at the end of Holy Week, on Easter Sunday, she was to experience the great of all joys. And as her son was the first born from the dead, so, because of her swift and speedy response to the Angel, she would receive the first fruits of her son's resurrection when she was assumed body and soul into heaven. All because she said 'yes' to God at the Annunciation.

The first reading for this Feast is Isaiah 7:10-14 in which a promise is made by the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz, one of the last kings of Judah before the deportation, that *'the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us"'*.

The second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews 10:4-10 The old sacrifices were imperfect - they could never bring humankind into a close relationship with God. Christ was fully obedient to the Father and so his sacrifice was perfect. *'Here I am! I am coming to do your will.'* Our Gospel reading is, of course, the account of the Annunciation, Luke 1:26-38. *"'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'Let what you have said be one to me.' And the angel left her."*

We believe thee to be full of grace,

O glorious Mary,

Virgin Mother of Christ,

and reparatrix of mankind!

*Great indeed are the blessings
thou hast conferred on us by giving him birth:
for the Fruit of thy womb,
Christ the Son of God,
hath delivered us
from the tyranny of our cruel enemy,
and hath made us companions
in the eternal kingdom.
Be thou, therefore,
we beseech thee, our advocate;
that through thy merits,
thy Son may set us free from our sins,
and after this life,
give us to reign forever in his kingdom.
Grant that he, who out of love for thee,
called thee to be his Mother,
may grant unto us
the rich sweetness of his love. Amen.*

The prayer I quote above is from the Mozarabic Rite of the Church, which is an ancient Latin rite, originally used in the Iberian Peninsula, and the word ‘reparatrix’ refers to ‘one who seeks to reconcile man with God.’ It was a new word to me! Every day’s a school day!

It has to be ‘I’ll Sing a Hymn To Mary’ today. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UcRrm0csng>

The Annunciation is such a rich source of prayer from around the Churches that I just have to give you another beautiful prayer for today, which, again, shines light on the meaning of this wonderful Feast:

*Almighty Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
You have revealed the beauty of your power
by exalting the lowly virgin of Nazareth
and making her the mother of our Saviour.
May the prayers of this woman
bring Jesus to the waiting world
and fill the void of incompleteness
with the presence of her child,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit*

one God forever and ever. Amen

I attach a picture of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth where the 'void of incompleteness' was filled. It's extraordinary to think I've been where the event which this Feast commemorates actually took place.

Enjoy this beautiful Feast and this beautiful day!

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.