

## **The Annunciation 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

What is the Word of God saying to us today, to the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century who find themselves in midst of the coronavirus pandemic?

Two things stand out to me very strongly in the readings set for today's great feast of the Annunciation, and I hope they might be of help to you too.

The first is the promise of God's presence, the assurance that God never just disappears and leaves us to deal with our problems on our own. The salvation story as described on the pages of the Bible makes it very clear that God's interest in us is deep and passionate.

Haven't we been created in the image of God? Our beginning and our end are in Him from whom we come and in whom we find our origin. This allows us to hope that our end is not the end as such but rather it's a gate to eternal life. Our names are written in God's heart, the heart overflowing with compassion and love. We don't need to be afraid. As Jesus once said to Nicodemus: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (J 3.16). It is true that death is inevitable. It comes to us all. However, the life-giving presence of Christ among us in his Word and Sacrament gives us the assurance that we will never perish but will have eternal life.

How does God come to us? He comes as 'Emmanuel', as 'God with us.' He desires to be close to each and every one of us. That's why he comes to us as someone we easily relate to, someone we don't need to be afraid of - a child. Today's feast of the Annunciation of Our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary provides us with a glimpse of Christmas joy. In the middle of Lent, we are reminded that 'the Word became flesh and made home among us' (J 1.14).

When the Angel Gabriel comes to Mary, the first words he says to her are, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' He assures her of God's continuing presence in her life and, although perplexed at first, she soon realises that this presence will materialise in form of a child.

She is the favoured one, because she is now the bearer of God's love. Her 'yes' to God's will opens the way for the Holy Spirit to work and for her to become a bearer of the hope of salvation for all people. This remarkable encounter with God changes her. At the end of the Annunciation story Mary is no longer perplexed or afraid. She is now ready to say, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according your word' (Lk 1.38).

This brings me to the second thing I would just like to briefly mention now and let you reflect on yourself throughout the rest of the day. These are the words the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary in the moment of fear: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God' (Lk 2.30).

Today and, indeed, every day, God, through his Holy Word, offers us his encouragement and assures us of his loving presence among us. He may not be present in the way we imagine him to be, but he, nevertheless, is present. In the time when our anxiety caused by the coronavirus pandemic grows and we become increasingly worried about our lives and the lives of our loved ones, let us try to find some comfort and peace in keeping this wonderful feast that speaks to us so clearly of God's desire to be close to us all.

Even when we are not able to be physically present in church, we can still set aside a time each day dedicated to listening to the word of God and asking the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's healing and transforming grace.

Let us hear the words Jesus speaks to his disciples, and take them to heart: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' (J 14.27).