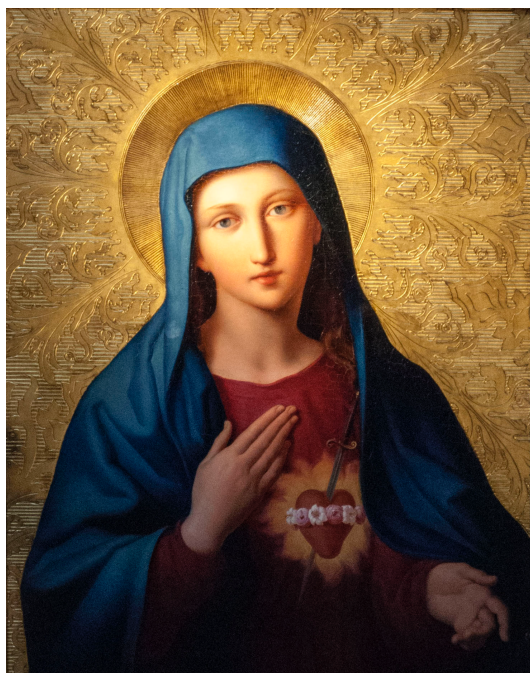


Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

March 25, 2022



I. *The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us; and we saw his glory.*

This verse from St. John's Prologue, sung just before our Gospel, strikes at the heart of today's Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

It makes plain the reason for our joy - God has drawn near! The glory of heaven has come to earth. The Lord has taken flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Contemplating and celebrating this mystery today invites us to three things: first, to marvel at God's plan for our salvation; second, to ponder the privileged place of Our Lady in his

design; and finally, this year, before the "senseless massacre [in Ukraine] where every day there is a repetition of slaughter and atrocities,"¹ to unite with our Holy Father in praying for peace and in consecrating all of humanity to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

II. First, we marvel at God's plan for saving us. We know the plan well, yet we can never cease to be in awe of it. For "though once we were lost and could not approach [him],"² in his goodness, God "came in mercy to the aid of all,"³ and sent his Only Begotten Son to be our Savior.

Today the Lord's coming is announced. St. Luke relates the good news in the Gospel. It unfolds as the angel Gabriel is sent to Nazareth, to the Virgin betrothed to Joseph.

¹ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, March 20, 2022.

² "Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I," *Roman Missal*, 2011.

³ "Eucharistic Prayer IV," *Roman Missal*, 2011.

The angel tells Mary something stupendous: She will conceive and bear a son by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

With this announcement – and Our Lady’s humility before God’s will - the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled. Her son will be Emmanuel, God-with-us. He will be great, called Son of the Most High, and through his love to the end on the Cross, we will have life and have it to the full.

Today, with the angel’s appearance, this good news breaks from on high. God’s plan is set in motion, and with Mary, we marvel that *nothing is impossible for God*.

III. Second, on this Solemnity, we ponder the privileged place of Our Lady in God’s design for salvation history.

Consider this text from the *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary* that we will pray at end of Mass today with the Holy Father in Rome and Catholics all over the world. It reads: “Mother of God and our Mother, in your Immaculate Heart, we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world. The ‘Fiat’ that arose from your heart opened the doors of history to the Prince of Peace. We trust that, through your heart, peace will dawn once more. To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world.”

As we see from this powerful and beautiful *Act of Consecration*, Mary’s place is unique. For in desiring to reconcile all things to himself, God chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the vessel through which to take flesh and enter our human condition.

Mary is *full of grace* and has indeed *found favor with God*. Conceived without sin, she was prepared for this moment.

In this wonderful Annunciation scene, she hears in faith Gabriel’s message, and by the power of her “yes,” everything is reborn in an instant. God takes flesh in her womb; the Savior dwells among us; and the trajectory of history is altered forever.

In saying her gracious words - *may it be done to me* - Mary assumes her singular role as *Theotokos*, God-bearer.

Today, in a special way, “at this dark hour,”⁴ let us remember that “the ‘Fiat’ that arose from [her] heart opened the doors of history to the *Prince of Peace*.”⁵ “Lovingly she bore him in her immaculate womb,”⁶ so that Christ could give his peace, one which the world cannot give (cf. Jn. 14:27). Through her, the Prince of Peace comes.

In being the Mother of God, Mary becomes our mother. For as God was given to her, so was she given to us.

We understand this gift. Indeed, how often, like the couple at Cana, do we feel Mary’s maternal care and powerful intercession?

On this Solemnity, as we celebrate the announcement of the Lord’s coming, we remember, too, Mary’s privileged role. We recall her closeness and ceaseless intercession.

IV. Finally, on this day, as the travesty of war rages still in Ukraine, and mindful of a Savior given and Our Lady’s care, we unite with Pope Francis for “the Solemn Act of Consecration of humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that she, the Queen of Peace, may help us obtain peace.”⁷

This we will do at the end of Mass. We will turn to Mary our Mother and beg her to intercede with her Son, the Prince of Peace, to end this unjust and unnecessary war.

With the Holy Father, we will raise up “the cry of pain of all those who suffer and implore an end to the violence, and...entrust the future of our human family to the Queen of Peace.”⁸

In his March 20, 2022 *Angelus*, Pope Francis described the ongoing tragedy: “So many grandparents, sick and poor people separated from their own families, so many children and fragile people are left to die under the bombs without being able to receive help and find safety even in the air raid shelters. All this is inhuman! Indeed, it is also sacrilegious because it goes against the sacredness of human life, especially against defenseless human life, which must be respected and protected, not eliminated...”⁹

⁴ Pope Francis, *Letter to Bishops*, March 21, 2022.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, March 25, 2022. (Emphasis added.)

⁶ “Preface: The Mystery of the Incarnation,” *Roman Missal*, 2011.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, March 20, 2022.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Letter to Bishops*, March 21, 2022.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, March 20, 2022.

As the world mourns these tragic violations of the Gospel of Life, we turn to Our Lady.

Consecrating all of humanity, and Russia and Ukraine in particular, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary fulfills the wish of Our Lady of Fatima.

As I said in my 2017 Pastoral Letter *Miracle of the Sun*, written on the 100th Anniversary of Fatima, “Our Lady of Fatima has a heart for Russia and asks us to have a heart for Russia as well.”¹⁰ Today, with Pope Francis, we show our heart for Russia, Ukraine, and the world.

“When she appeared at Fatima in 1917, World War I and the Russian Revolution were raging. As Our Lady prayed at the foot of the Cross then, so she prays for the Church and for the world at moments of crisis and upheaval. She is intimately present to us and prays for our families and for us at the moments of crisis we experience in life. She protected St. John Paul II in his hour of need and she protects us now.

On May 13, 1982, exactly one year after the assassination attempt on his life in St. Peter’s Square, Pope St. John Paul II explained Our Lady of Fatima’s desire that we consecrate ourselves and the world to her Immaculate Heart:

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means drawing near, through the Mother’s intercession, to the very Fountain of life that sprang from Golgotha. This Fountain pours forth unceasingly redemption and grace. In it reparation is made continually for the sins of the world. It is a ceaseless source of new life and holiness. Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning beneath the Cross of the Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced Heart of the Savior, bringing it back to the very source of its Redemption. Redemption is always greater than man’s sin and the ‘sin of the world.’ The power of the Redemption is infinitely superior to the whole range of evil in man and the world. The Heart of the Mother is aware of this, more than any other heart in the whole universe, visible and invisible.”¹¹

With our Holy Father Pope Francis, let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary with great love and affection. Let us remember with her that *nothing is impossible for God*.

¹⁰ Bishop John O. Barres, *The Miracle of the Sun – Fatima: 100 Years!*, May 13, 2017.

¹¹ Bishop John O. Barres, *The Miracle of the Sun – Fatima: 100 Years!*, May 13, 2017.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

Our Lady of the Annunciation, pray for us.

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.

Our Lady of Peace, pray for us.