

- This weekend is a rather dramatic weekend, liturgically speaking.
- First, we have the great solemnity of the Annunciation, the glory of which sometimes gets a bit lost amidst the penitential nature of Lent. And yet, what an important feast it is for us to celebrate – and definitely a dramatic one!
- For in the Annunciation, we do not simply recall the miraculous visit of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, announcing that she is to be the Virgin Mother of God.
- In the Solemnity of the Annunciation, we honor our Lady for saying yes to our Lord's invitation, which in turn led to the Incarnation of our Lord – making our salvation a possibility!
- Imagine: the salvation for all of humanity depending on the free consent of a teenaged virgin! Yet, that's what was at stake as St. Gabriel approached our Lady in Nazareth so long ago.
- Though perfectly sinless, our Lady still had perfect freedom to say yes or no to our Lord. For our Lord never forces Himself or His will upon anyone, including the Virgin Mary.
- Yet, our Lady, with grace and humility both sublime and gentle, chose for God's will to be done, and we are the beneficiaries.
- Thus, the annunciation of our salvation and Mary's acceptance of this august role in the salvation of all mankind is therefore a cause of great wonder and rejoicing, for the mystery of the Annunciation is the sign that God desires not only to save us, but for man to be intimately involved in his salvation!
- This incredible mystery shows us the power and responsibility that God accords to free will. Salvation is indeed a gift that God alone gives; but man must respond by an act of his own free will. We see this so clearly in the Virgin Mary.
- Because she said yes to our Lord's invitation to be the Mother of God, we now have the chance to say yes to the gift of salvation.
- Because Mary allowed our Lord to dwell within her, she has now opened the door for Him to enter the world and dwell with the whole human race! And our salvation is found in being in union with His will, and with the Church that He founded.
- Yet, as we celebrate the wondrous feast of the Annunciation this weekend, we must also call to mind that we are now at the 5th Sunday of Lent, also known in the ancient calendar of the Church as Passion Sunday.
- With today's Mass we enter into Passiontide, the last two weeks of Lent in which we find an increasing revelation of Jesus' divinity in our Gospel stories, as well as an increasing tension between Jesus and those who seek His death.
- Certainly, we see this tension in Jesus' interaction with the Jews, who want to stone Him in today's Gospel.
- Passiontide is generally marked by the veiling of statues and crucifixes as a means of increasing our fasting, fasting even from the consolation these beautiful elements of our church give to us.
- The veiling of crucifixes also reminds us of how, as his arrest drew nearer, Jesus was no longer able to walk about freely among the Jews who were trying to kill Him, but rather had to hide at times.

- Of course, if the Master is hidden, so too must His servants be hidden, which is why we veil the images of saints as well.
- You'll also notice that, during Passiontide, we do not use the bells during the Canon. Rather, we use a harsh clacker, which reminds us of the hammer blows by which nails were cruelly driven into our Lord's hands and feet.
- That harsh sound of the clacker is an invitation to us to think about and repent of all the ways we have contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus through our sins. That awful noise is an invitation to contrition.
- And so, we have this liturgical tension this weekend as we celebrate our Lord's incarnation made possible through His mother's *fiat*, and we recall as well, with contrition, the whole purpose of the Incarnation: that Christ might die for our sins.
- Yet, even the sorrow and contrition that should stir within our hearts on this Passion Sunday are not without hope. For in just 2 short weeks, we will be celebrating the glory of our Lord's resurrection at Easter!
- Thus, my friends, today is ultimately a day of rejoicing, even as we seek to amend our lives through prayer and penance in this holy season. Truly, it's a day of hope.
- And, certainly we need hope, especially now when we see so much division within our society, and so many ways in which our Christian faith is being attacked, marginalized, and contradicted.
- But these types of things must never get us down, for we have a promise from our Lord, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against His Church – which ultimately means that, if we stay true to the Church and in union with Her, we have nothing to fear.
- Moreover, if we stay close to our Lady, if we are dedicated to her – most especially by praying the Rosary – she will make us her very own children, protecting us and guiding us toward God's will.
- As we enter into these last two weeks of Lent, I encourage you to examine your conscience well. In what ways have you sinned, and thereby contributed to the crucifixion of our Lord? What do you still need to confess?
- As well, I encourage you to increase your devotion to our Lady, being sure to pray to her every day: asking for her intercession, and seeking to imitate her virtues. Most especially, asking her for the grace always to do God's will, no matter what it costs you.
- And lastly, have hope. While the world can seem like a very dark place right now, and while the human leadership of our Church may be in disarray, our Lord is still very much in charge. And His Church is still His bride, and the means of our salvation.
- Thus, we must unite ourselves ever more closely with Her, being Her faithful children, even if some among her leadership are not themselves faithful.
- For this is how we say yes to our Lord as Mary did; this is how we exercise our free will in order to accept the gift of our Lord's salvation.
- Our Lady of the Annunciation, pray for us!