

Homily for the Solemnity of the Annunciation

March 24, 2025, at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris

Gathered this evening around our archbishop in this magnificent restored Notre-Dame Cathedral, in communion with those who follow this mass on television, we are joyful to celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God on this Solemnity of the Annunciation. We give thanks for the Word made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, for God who became man to bring us salvation.

This Eucharist is also an act of thanksgiving because last December 18, Pope Francis recognized the heroic virtues of Pierre Goursat and declared him Venerable. This is only a first step, but an important one, in the process of his Cause for canonization, which was introduced 15 years ago in the diocese of Paris. A Parisian, he loved this city very much. Both contemplative and a man of action, this humble layman, founder of the Emmanuel Community, allowed himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit to serve the Church. His life was marked by the presence of the Virgin Mary. Born on August 15, 1914, the day of the Feast of the Assumption, Pierre Goursat died on March 25, 1991. After benefiting from Mary's protection during a time of great danger, under the occupation of Paris in 1944, he constantly entrusted himself to her maternal intercession.

Let us be enlightened by the texts of the Word of God that the Church offers us on this feast of the Annunciation. Echoing Psalm 39, the Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus, the Son of God, "upon entering the world," acts in obedience to his Father: "Here I am, I have come, my God, to do your will." This same attitude of total availability to fulfill the Father's loving plan also characterizes Mary, this young woman from Nazareth, when she welcomes the words of the archangel Gabriel who announces to her that God has chosen her to give birth to the Savior of the world.

The Angel's Greeting to Mary

The angel addresses Mary by saying: "Hail, Full of Grace, the Lord is with you." In the Greek text of Luke's Gospel, the term translated here as "Hail" is more precise and stronger: it is "Rejoice!" a formula found in several prophets of the first Covenant, notably Zephaniah. The angel's greeting to Mary is therefore not a simple polite protocol formula. It is the expression of the messianic joy that marks the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and inaugurates the new times, as affirmed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates the 'fullness of time' (Gal 4:4), that is, the fulfillment of the promises and preparations" (n. 484).

Mary is among those humble and poor of the Lord who hope and receive salvation from him with confidence. She is the "daughter of Zion" par excellence, in whom the promise is fully fulfilled, when the Son of God is conceived in her womb and, through the mystery of the Incarnation, assumes our human nature.

Mary, who is steeped in Scripture, also knows Isaiah's oracle - the first reading of this mass - addressed to King Ahaz eight centuries before our era to announce the birth of a son: "Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" (Is 7:14). It is precisely this verse from Isaiah that Matthew cites in his Gospel (chapter 1, verse 23) when the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph to explain the divine origin of the child Mary carries and encourage him to take her as his wife.

When she receives the angel's words, Mary understands that God calls her to bear the Messiah in her womb and give birth to him. Yet she is overwhelmed by this revelation she did not expect. That is why, to calm her, he says "Do not be afraid." Referring then to Nathan's prophecy addressed to King David in the second Book of Samuel (2 Sam 7:12-16), the angel announces to Mary that she will bear a son and the name that will be given to him: "Jesus," which in Hebrew means "God saves" or "God Savior." This name expresses both the identity and mission of the Messiah announced by the prophets.

"How will this be?"

Mary does not doubt the promise made to her, but she reacts realistically. Legally married to Joseph according to Jewish custom, they do not yet live together. That is why she asks: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel explains to Mary that the child she will bear will be conceived by the intervention of the Holy Spirit and that the Power of the Most High will "overshadow" her. This is again a clear allusion to Scripture and the luminous cloud that guided the Israelites' journey in the desert. During its halts, a large tent, called the "Tent of Meeting" or the "Dwelling," was set up in the camp, which housed the Ark of the Covenant.

The cloud is a manifestation of the divine presence. In the Book of Exodus, it is said that it overshadowed the Tent of Meeting and filled it with the glory of the Lord (cf. Ex 40:34-35). Just as the cloud overshadowed the Dwelling and filled it with God's glory, the Holy Spirit will overshadow Mary and fill her with the divine presence: Mary then becomes the new "Ark of the Covenant," the living tabernacle that bears the "Holy One," the Savior of the world. In Mary, we contemplate Jesus, who in her and through her, comes to dwell among his people.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word!"

What characterizes Mary's attitude is her humility and faith. Available to the action of the Holy Spirit, she fully adheres to the word spoken to her to allow God's plan to be fulfilled. Humble servant, she effaces herself before the Lord. By her "Fiat," her frank and total acquiescence, Mary freely submits to God's will, for whom "nothing is impossible," so that through the Incarnation of his Son all human beings may be saved and benefit from his Mercy. This is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church presents Mary as the most beautiful example of "the obedience of faith" (n. 144).

It is in the luminous wake of Marian humility that Pierre Goursat strove to place his own spiritual journey every day. Those who knew him unanimously testify that the virtue of humility guided him to the end of his path, enabling him to discern, as best as possible, God's will in all things.

The mystery of the Incarnation that we celebrate on this Solemnity of the Annunciation already opens us to that of Redemption, to the victory of the risen Christ over death. Lent is a time of preparation for the feast of Easter, which is the central mystery of our Christian faith. By contemplating Jesus, the Son of God who offers himself for us from his conception in Mary's womb, and who gives himself for us on the Cross, as well as the offering of herself that the Virgin Mary made by accepting to respond to God's call, we understand that we too must live this self-giving and actively cooperate in this wonderful work of salvation that God continues to accomplish in our lives and in the world.

Let us accept to be renewed and guided by the Holy Spirit by welcoming the Word of God and putting it into practice, with great inner availability. The Virgin Mary helps us in this, as we entrust our lives to her, especially through the prayer of the rosary. In this Notre-Dame Cathedral, built in

her honor, let us ask Mary this evening to lead us to her Son, to make us know him better, and, like her, to be able to say to him:

"Let it be to me according to your word!"

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of the Venerable Pierre Goursat