



The Annunciation
By Leonardo da Vinci
1472-1475 Oil and Tempera
on wood, Florence Uffizi

Leonardo's early painting of the Annunciation owes much to the influence of his master, Andrea del Verrocchio. However, it is considered to be da Vinci's first major work, a large painting executed by his own hand with, perhaps, the help of Verrocchio's workshop.

What if Mary had said “No”?

By Fr Gregory Jensen

The question may strike you as irreverent. How dare I suggest that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven, Tower of David, and all the other titles, could have left us in the lurch like that?

But what if she had? *Could* she have said No? You might say that of course she couldn't, she was far too holy — but you would be guilty of demeaning and dangerous sentimentality. It is demeaning because it turns Our Lady from a free human being into a sanctified automaton. The whole glory of the Annunciation is that Mary, the second Eve, could have said No to God *but she said Yes instead*. That is what we celebrate, that is what we praise her for; and rightly so.

This sentimental view is dangerous too. If we believe that the most important decision in the history of the world was in fact inevitable, that it couldn't have been otherwise, then that means it was effortless. Now we have a marvelous excuse for laziness. Next time we're faced with a tough moral decision, we needn't worry about doing what is right. Just drift, and God will make sure that whatever choice we make is the right one. If God really wants us to do something he'll sweep us off our feet the way he did Mary, and if he chooses not to, it's hardly our fault, is it?

So Mary could have said No to Gabriel. What if she had? He couldn't just go and ask someone else, like some sort of charity collector. With all the genealogies and prophecies in the Bible, there was only one candidate. It's an alarming thought. Ultimately, of course, God would have done something. The history of salvation is the history of him never abandoning his people however pig-headed they were. But God has chosen to work through human history. If the first attempt at redemption took four thousand years to prepare, from the Fall to the Annunciation, how many tens of thousands of years would the next attempt have taken?

Even if the world sometimes makes us feel like cogs in a machine, each of us is unique and each of us is here for a purpose. Just because it isn't as spectacular a purpose as Mary's, it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. When we fail to seek our vocation, or put off fulfilling some part of it, we try to justify ourselves by saying that someone else will do it better, that God will provide, that it doesn't really matter. But we are lying. However small a part I have to play, the story of the Annunciation tells me it is my part and no-one else can do it.

Faced with the enormity of her choice, how was Mary able to decide? If she said No, unredeemed generations would toil on under the burden of sin. If she said Yes, she herself would suffer, and so would her Son but both would be glorified. Millions of people not yet born would have Heaven open to them; but millions of others would suffer oppression and death in her son's name. The stakes were almost infinite.

You might say that Mary didn't worry about all this, just obeyed God but I don't believe it. What God wanted was not Mary's unthinking obedience but her full and informed consent as the representative of the entire human race. The two greatest miracles of the Annunciation are these – that God gave Mary the wisdom to know the consequences of her decision and that he gave her the grace not to be overwhelmed by that knowledge.

When we come to an important decision in our lives, we can easily find our minds clouded by the possible consequences, or even more, by partial knowledge of them. How can we ever move, when there is so much good and evil whichever way we go? The Annunciation gives us the answer. God's grace will give us the strength to move, even if the fate of the whole world is hanging in the balance. After all, God does not demand that our decisions should be the correct ones, only that they should be rightly made.

There is one more truth that the Annunciation teaches us and it is so appalling that I can think of nothing uplifting to say about it that will take the sting away. Perhaps it is best forgotten because it tells us more about God than we are able to understand. The Almighty Father creates heaven and earth, the sun and all the stars but when he really wants something done, this Omnipotent and Omniscient One, comes to one of his poor, weak creatures — and he asks. And, day by day, he keeps on asking us.

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MASSES & SERVICES

Saturday Anticipated Mass: 5pm
Sunday Masses: 9am, 11am, 5pm

Mon – Wed Masses: 8am

Thurs Mass & OLPH Novena:

8am & 12pm Noon

1st Thurs: 12pm Mass/Novena/

Healing Prayers

Fri, Sat & Holidays: 9am Mass

Fri in July & August: 8am Mass

Children's Mass: 9am 1st Sunday

of the month Oct-June

Children's Liturgy: 11am

All Sundays except the 1st Sunday

from Sept- June

Reconciliation

Saturday 4pm - 4:45pm

Adoration

Saturday 9:30-10am

OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Friday 9am-4pm

CLERGY & STAFF

Pastor

Babu Mathew, CSsR

Associate Pastor

Joseph Horo, CSsR

Office Manager

Virginia Fong

Pastoral Coordinator

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OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP PARISH

March 22, 2020

4th Sunday of Lent

All Public Masses and Parish Gatherings Temporarily Suspended

Dear Parishioners,

Out of the need for safety and to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Archbishop Miller announced that all Sunday and weekday Masses are to be suspended. Below is an excerpt from his message (March 20):

“After further prayerful consideration; and after no small amount of sadness; and after hearing from senior pastors and others about the need for a single directive for the entire Archdiocese; and in keeping with the regulations of the other Dioceses of British Columbia; I direct that all Masses, whether Sunday or weekday, beginning on Saturday, March 21, are to be offered without a public congregation, until further notice. This likewise applies to other parish activities and celebrations, such as Stations of the Cross, and so on.

Consequently, all the faithful are dispensed, for the time being, from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Recognizing the great sacrifice involved for those who are unable to receive the Eucharist, particularly during this time of suffering, I invite all the faithful to deepen their relationship to the Lord by uniting themselves to his Passion.

Wherever possible – that is, whenever the health and safety of the community can be scrupulously attended to – churches may remain open for private prayer and Adoration. However, for the good of the wider community, seniors or those who have serious medical conditions are strongly urged to remain at home and pray to the Father in secret (cf. Mt 6:6).” You can read Archbishop Miller's letter in full on rcav.org.

The church will be open from 9am-6pm for private prayer by individuals. Let us turn to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in fervent prayer to aid those afflicted by this virus, and for breakthrough solutions in these challenging times.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Babu Mathew, CSsR



'The Healing of the Man born Blind' by Duccio 1307/8-11 National Art

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Saint Augustine, commenting on the narrative from this week's Gospel wrote, “This blind man is the human race.”

Although the man's physical blindness was not due to his sin, all of mankind is stricken with spiritual blindness, passed on to us by our father Adam due to his prideful desire to find fulfillment apart from God. That act of rebellion resulted in man's expulsion from the Garden, into the desert of a world deformed and darkened by sin.

All of us, like the blind man, are unable to heal ourselves. Desiring to see, we stumble about in darkness and misery.

At the heart of this fascinating narrative is a simple but powerful contrast: the man who is blind from birth knows little but upon encountering the healing Savior, he is able to see not just physically but through the eyes of faith.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. - Psalm 23

Weekly Collection: Sunday Mass Offering Mar 14 & 15: \$2,550.35. St Joseph's Society: \$35. Offering for the Needy: \$23. Share Lent: \$20. Thank you for your faith-filled generosity.

Seniors or Sick Who Need Help: The parish has a small group of volunteers who are able to help with grocery shopping and home delivery. If you are a senior parishioner who needs help with grocery shopping at this time, please call the parish office 604-224-4344 or email reception.olph@rcav.org.

Confessions: Because of the fear of contagion, the sacrament of Reconciliation will not be administered in the church confessionals. It will be available by appointment in the parish office. Please call 604-224-4344 to book your appointment.

Tax Receipt by Email: If you would like your tax receipt to be emailed to you, please send a message to reception.olph@rcav.org. If you would prefer to pick up printed copies, please stop by the parish office any day Monday- Friday 9am-4pm.

Cancelled: The CWL General Meeting and associated presentation "It can happen to Anyone" by speakers from Children of the Street scheduled for March 26, 2020 are cancelled. Introduction to that group's presentation at <https://www.childrenofthestreet.com/itcha>

Stations of the Cross: Join us for the Stations of the Cross to meditate on the suffering of the Lord every Friday of Lent at 7pm followed by our Lenten Series Video & discussion.

Lenten Retreat for Ministry Leaders with Fr. Juan Lucca: All who work in ministry are invited to a Lenten Retreat with Fr. Juan Lucca on Friday, April 3 from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the John Paul II Pastoral Centre in Vancouver. Life serving in ministry can be so busy and hectic that we might be tempted to lose focus on the most important things: the sacraments, prayer, grace, faith and even Jesus Himself. In this way, it is very easy to lose our heart for Christ amid all the distractions which try to drag us away from our Saviour. At this Lenten Retreat, Fr. Juan Lucca will explore how to live the Liturgy of Triduum, how to have a living encounter with the mystery of the Incarnate Christ, His passion and death, so that we may share in the Easter joy of His Resurrection. Register at: <https://rcav.org/event/lenen-retreat-for-ministry-leaders-with-fr-juan-lucca/>



SHARE LENT

Next week is Share Lent Sunday. In these last weeks of Lent, let us learn, reflect, pray and act in solidarity with the peoples of the Amazon and the Earth, our common home. Next week we will carry Archbishop Miller's message for Share Lent.

Sight is one of the Creator's greatest gifts. While we apprehend the world through physical sight, we need spiritual sight to truly comprehend it. In restoring the blind man's sight, Jesus refuses to deem his affliction a consequence of sin. From Jesus's response to the Pharisees, we learn that the true sin is spiritual blindness. There are none so blind as those who will not see.

The age-old story of sight and blindness is echoing in the dwindling Amazon rainforest. In Brazil's Rondônia State, the seringueiro artisanal rubber tappers ply their traditional trade and gather nuts and fruits on small state-recognized reserves. They are an abandoned, persecuted people. The state provides them almost no education or health services. Worse still, their lands, livelihoods and very lives are threatened by powerful logging and industrial farming interests. We in the West, too, sometimes suffer from blindness. We fail to see how our consumerism drives the demand for resources and, thereby, the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and other ecological hotspots. With "blind confidence in technical solutions (Laudato Si', 14)," we blithely ignore mounting scientific evidence for an impending ecological crisis. Isn't our refusal to change our habits, to consume less, to tread lightly on the Earth a form of spiritual blindness?

Offering an exit from this unseeing state, Pope Francis reminds us that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience (Laudato Si', 217)." **More info: www.dev.org**

Stewardship Reflection

*"Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart."
(1 Samuel 16:7)*

How often do we invest our time, talent, and treasure in creating an appearance that does not matter at all to God? We strive to impress with our clothing, home, career, possessions, car, and other marks of distinction. But none of these illusions of greatness will impress God. Instead, He will look into our hearts to see how much we loved Him, how much we loved others and how we showed that love by the way we used our time, talent, and treasure here on earth.

Stewardship Office, Archdiocese of St. Louis

MARCH

Lenten Series Cancelled



Following Christ takes more than simply believing in him or doing what he asks of us. Jesus wants you to be more than just a believer — He wants you to be his disciple and friend. *Follow Me: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is your guide to a personal encounter with Christ. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus seeks after us. He comes to meet us and beckons us to follow him. He calls us to be his disciples, to trust him, to open ourselves to his merciful love, and to love others as he has loved us. *Follow Me* invites you to experience the joy of a renewed friendship with Christ.

7:20 – 8pm Parish Hall
Every Friday of Lent after the Stations of the Cross at 7pm

Lenten Retreat Cancelled



Redemptorist Associates Retreat: Meditations on the Cross by St Alphonsus Liguori Saturday March 28. Coffee at 9:30am in the Hall. 10am – Noon. Talks & Meditation in the Church. Admission is free.



What is Spiritual Communion?

As attendance at Mass has become a risk because of the coronavirus, the Church encourages us to witness the Mass on TV or over the internet and say a prayer of Spiritual Communion.

By Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

When I was growing up, my mother would often make a spiritual communion and speak of its value. I didn't really pay much attention. It was fine for her, I reasoned. After all, it couldn't hurt. But like many of what I considered her "pre-Vatican II" practices, I didn't put much stock in it. With time, maturity, and education, I am beginning to realize the value of many of my mother's prayers and devotions.

I recently read *7 Secrets of the Eucharist* by Vinny Flynn. It is a wonderful book, designed to help increase devotion to the Eucharist. The last chapter focuses on spiritual communions. Flynn relies on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. There are both sacramental and spiritual communions. Sacramental communion refers to the physical reception of the Eucharist. Spiritual communion involves "a real longing for union with Christ."

Ideally, reception of the Eucharist involves both dimensions. One must always want to receive regular sacramental Communion. However, St. Thomas tells us that a "complete spiritual Communion can even take place when we are unable to receive sacramentally, because 'the effect of a sacrament can be secured if it is received by desire.'"

St. Catherine of Siena also testified to the value of spiritual Communion. "She had begun to question whether her spiritual Communions had any real value compared to sacramental Communion. Suddenly she saw Christ holding two chalices. 'In this golden chalice I put your sacramental communions. In this silver chalice I put your spiritual communions. Both chalices are quite pleasing to me.'" In 2003, Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*:

In the Eucharist, "unlike any other sacrament, the mystery [of communion] is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing: Here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union."

Precisely for this reason it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*. This was the origin of the practice of "spiritual communion," which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.

St. Teresa of Jesus wrote: "When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you" [*The Way of Perfection*, Ch. 35.].

A spiritual Communion can be of value to anyone who desires a deeper union with Christ. It can be made at any time of the day or night. It is especially appropriate for those who find themselves unable to physically receive the Eucharist. For example, those who are not yet Catholic, those who have been away from the Church for a long time and who have not yet made a good confession, those who are living in a state of serious sin, as well as those who are sick or housebound.

How does one make a spiritual Communion? Simply by desiring it. One formal prayer of Spiritual Communion is:

"O Jesus, I turn toward the holy tabernacle where you live hidden for love of me. I love you, O my God. I cannot receive you in Holy Communion. Come nevertheless and visit me with your grace. Come spiritually into my heart. Purify it. Sanctify it. Render it like unto your own."

One need not use a formal prayer, however. A simple "Lord Jesus. Come into my heart" is sufficient, as is imagining Jesus coming into one's heart. As with any other spiritual habit, the more one does it, the easier it will become. There is no limit to the number of times we can ask Jesus to meet us. He desires to be with us.

www.catholicexchange.com

The Present is the Time to do Good

By Lindsey Kettner

*"How Bad Will the Coronavirus Outbreak Get?"
"Growing Anxiety as Doctors Prepare for an Epidemic"
"Coronavirus pummels financial markets"*

There's so much uncertainty and heightened fear from coronavirus and its current and potential impacts across the globe. Rather than give in to anxiety, we can respond through the eyes of our Catholic Faith.

Memento Mori

The unknown can be scary, disease and death can be frightening, but our faith tells us that death is not the end. When we are faced with situations like coronavirus, they can be an opportunity to consider our mortality and the inevitable end of this earthly life.

"I think this is a good reminder that this is an important part of Christian spirituality that nobody likes to talk about.

The *memento mori*, remember death. You're going to die; there's no two ways around it. And that sounds grim, but the saints of old when they found out they were about to die their attitude was like, "Oh boy!" explained Fr. Richard Simon, speaking about coronavirus on The Drew Mariani Show

Be in a state of grace

Patrick Madrid also gave some advice to those who are watching the news and wondering what will happen. "How bad will it get? I don't know. I wish I did know. But I do know one thing ... regardless of what may be happening and how bad it may get ... just remember to always be in the state of grace. That's the key right there—just be in the state of grace. Jesus said, 'In the world you will have tribulation'—and maybe this is part of the tribulation that Jesus was referring to—"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world."

In this earthly life you never want to be caught unaware or unprepared. We never know when the end of this life will come, and Patrick recommends that if you are not prepared, you use this coronavirus outbreak as an incentive to get there. You have nothing to fear, he says, "if you're in the state of grace, if you are going to Confession on a regular basis, if you fall into mortal sin you quickly get out of it and make a good, purposeful amendment not to fall into mortal sin again."

Focus on Today

When disasters occur and diseases ravage the earth, many people wonder if they are signs that the end of the world is near. But rather than worrying about tomorrow, Fr. Simon says that we should focus on today.

"You live a day at a time and if you wake up tomorrow morning, it will be today. And you do your best in each day and it's all you can do. You love the people God's given you to love in a day," explained Fr. Simon. Our preoccupation with what *might* happen keeps us from living out God's plan for our lives today.

"C.S. Lewis makes the point that the devil wants us to live at any moment except right now," remarked Fr. Simon. "If he can get us to live in the future, he can keep us from living today and this present moment is where heaven meets earth, where I can do good, I can hear from God."

www.relevantradio.com