

Lenten Letters from Father Jonathan

March 25th The Feast of the Annunciation

This day is a Solemnity and comes six days after the Solemnity of St. Joseph. It is a gift to have these days in such proximity for they affirm for us when we give our “yes” to God that great good can be ushered into the world because Jesus is given the opportunity to be present in and through us.

These days of challenge and crisis can be an invitation to a renewed sense of how in the ordinary experiences of home life, Jesus is present in a special way. We are spending a lot of time together with those closest to us. As we mark this week with the Holy Family, the Feast of the Annunciation is an invitation for us to surrender to the will and purposes of God, and thereby help our families to grow in holiness.

The Church teaches there is a distinction between God’s active and permissive will. A clear example of God’s active will is expressed in the moral code we call the Ten Commandments. It is God’s active will that we honour and place him first in our lives and in turn honour all of our relationships, beginning with parents, life, marriage, property and the reputation of others. However God’s permissive will allows for His active will to be either ignored or willfully violated. What we see in the Holy Family is how they were so intent on responding to God’s active will, “I am the servant of the Lord”, says our Lady, “let it be done unto me according to your word”; that in a world of great hardship and suffering, Mary and Joseph never lost their focus as they lived purposefully for the Lord.

In these days where God permissive will requires us to face a generational challenge, like our ancestors faced with two World Wars, a Great Depression we feel very vulnerable.

The Annunciation is a Feast inviting us to a deepening trust in choosing to do God’s active will as depicted in this 1895 painting by Ontario artist Mary Alexandra Bell Eastlake hanging in the Montreal Museum of Fine Art.



The Virgin Mary's plain clothing recalls that of a peasant woman. The artist has chosen to signify Mary's holiness with a simple golden outline around her hair. By outlining the background vegetation in the same way, she suggests a connection between the Virgin and nature, or I would suggest the experience of the everyday. The focal point is Mary's pensive gaze, irresistibly drawing the viewer's eye.

At this time I think we all have experienced times when we have been gazing pensively as we try to understand how to make sense of what is happening in our lives. May we allow this painting to accompany us today as we ask for the grace to do God's active will in the ordinary events of home life and more deeply embrace the opportunity we have to grow in holiness in such trying days. Like the red cape of Mary, may we allow the blood of Jesus to enfold us with his life-giving presence.

With my love and prayers,

Fr Jonathan