

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT YEAR B HOMILY 2020
ANNUNCIATION – MARY SAYS YES TO THE DIVINE MYSTERY
Lk 1.26-38 2Sam 7.1-16 Rom 16.25-27

Waiting in anticipation is something we are all used to in life. When I was growing up, I recall always looking forward to and getting excited about Christmas, such that when I was very young, perhaps 4, as the oldest of 3 children at the time, Mum and Dad had me thinking Christmas was coming a day later than it actually was, and I got such a surprise when Father Christmas came a day early, and I hadn't got up before sunrise to see what had come! They only tricked me once, never again!! Way back there, I also remember being shocked, even horrified, at a tradesman coming to fix something at home, in December and saying he wished Christmas would never come, whereas I was of the opposite view that it couldn't come fast enough. Then, as I got older, I could more appreciate his point of view, given that so many things have to get done, Christmas cards sent, presents purchased, and preparations made. Are you there yet, in this very different leadup to Christmas 2020, tending to think the sooner it's over the better!?

In the faith story, we have Mary as the first faithful disciple, as a followup, prior to John the Baptist's prophetic mission in preparing the way in anticipation of Jesus. From Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord, to Here Comes the Sun, now to Let it Be (*Paul McCartney's lovely hymn in memory of his late Catholic mother, Mary, who died when he was 14*), in the words of Mary herself, saying *yes*, and entering into the mystery of God's revelation in Luke's Gospel.

Richard Leonard SJ has an interesting reflection titled '*Waiting in Line*', where he speaks of patience as a virtue, taking the example of being in a queue, and accepting that this is the most efficient form of getting the service we want, without all cramming into a chaotic rush. *"Every year all of us in the Church figuratively stand in line and remind ourselves of how blessed we are to have seen our salvation in Jesus. It was well worth the wait... And we cultivate our patience for life's valleys, mountains and crooked paths where sometimes we can feel Jesus' absence more than his presence, where it is only when we look back and can see that he was with us as we went up-hill and down-dale. Advent keeps us humble, knowing that we are the direct beneficiaries of God's patience with us, and that, through no time and effort of our own, we have been definitively rewarded. As we wait together in line during Advent, let's do so with good humour and keep saying yes to all that salvation holds for us; yes to God's personal love; yes to Jesus' kingdom of justice and peace; yes to every opportunity to serve the Gospel, and yes to knowing that God is a companion with us at every step of our journey."*

As Brendan Byrne, yet another SJ, describes Mary's role: *"Supremely here, in the person of Mary, we learn that it is people of faith who channel God's presence and power into the world."* Saying yes and taking a step forward into the unknown, is a thought for all of us to ponder and act upon, as we face the uncertainties of life, yet determined to make a difference by our active response to this Gospel, modelled by Mary's faith and fidelity, despite her initial hesitation and uncertainty. And then there is Joseph, the shadowy figure as a man of dreams, who likewise moves from anxiety in himself, and concern for his proposed wife Mary, to stepping up to take responsibility, providing support, love and care for her, as life evolves and new life emerges as Jesus, in the mystery of Incarnation.

Claude Mostowik MSC also has some good insights: *"As Mary brought Jesus to birth and hope to the world, we are called to give birth to Jesus and nourish hope in the world – even if it seems hopeless, unappreciated or thankless. Dare we look and recognize a Presence in everyday faces?"* He moves on to remind us that we all have a part to play in actively responding to what our faith in Jesus tells us to do, in our own small way, quoting Pope Francis, (another SJ!), telling us to engage *"in the noise of the world... (and to) live in a full and conscious way, with a concern directed to others... and not (to be) overwhelmed by the weariness of discouragement, a lack of hope or disappointment."*

And so we wait with some degree of patience, but not for much longer, as the pre-Christmas rush continues. We focus on Mary's simple active faith, and return to her at New Year, her feast as mother of Jesus, so Mother of God and of God's People, you and me, the Church.