



Homily For The
Patronal Feast of Our Lady Immaculate
8th December 2021

At the end of the Gospel we have just shared together, there is a simple statement, and the angel left her. Of course, there is much to ponder on what has happened during the encounter between the angel and Mary. But these words, and the angel left her, speak to me of the reality of my discipleship, and probably yours.

How lovely it would be, to have the archangel Gabriel around throughout our lives, revealing the word of the Lord to us, answering our questions, supporting and reassuring us. Sadly this is not our experience. We do not have the sense of being carried along on a wave of obvious blessing.

We are invited to receive our vocation and to move onwards, often into a space where we feel we are on our own. And yet, of course, the Lord never leaves us alone. He always supports us, even when this is not very apparent.

And so to the beginning of the annunciation. The angel appeared to Our Lady in the sixth month, not June but the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. I remember the day my little sister was born. There was lots of running around, towels and water. Our faith is never a theoretical business, but grounded in the realities of human life, one might say the messiness of it all. And so it is with Our Lady.

Mary's experience of vocation and holiness is tied to God's unfolding revelation. And this takes place within the context of a people with its

own story and culture. Gathered here today in the Cathedral, we represent our diocesan family throughout the communities of this local church. We too have a calling from the Lord, we are to bear fruit as missionary disciples.

This is part of an unfolding story of salvation, and this moment follows on from the revelation to Zechariah that his wife is to bear the precursor, the one who will prepare the way. In that moment, Zechariah is unbelieving and unable to speak. Mary is believing and then able to speak, and she speaks precisely as a mother with a child in her womb.

As we celebrate the principal patronal feast of our diocese, we too are called to speak God's word. This demands the openness of faith. May we never become dumb in the words of joyful proclamation and charitable action, which is evangelisation at its best.

So let's think now about the ability to gift ourselves to others, or another way of looking at this, our capacity for generosity. This begins with a docility to the Holy Spirit, a willingness to embrace what the Lord wants for us. We may understand generosity by reflecting on the Annunciation and Our Lady's response to what is asked of her. She does not become a part-time mother, but one that gives herself completely to the work of motherhood. Neither is this vocation reduced to a series of tasks. More fundamentally, Mary's relationship with her vocation creates a relationship between herself and Jesus. It is the same with ourselves.

What we do must always spring like a fountain from who we are. Generally speaking, this is what does happen. This is why Jesus tells us,

'In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.' (Mt 7.17-18)

It seems to me, a problem for disciples is striving to act in certain ways, an acting that is challenged by the fact it is not rooted in who the disciple really is. Our Lady is good at mothering, precisely because she has the capacity to be a mother in her being. This is not about the constant struggle we all have with virtue and holiness. But we cannot reduce our discipleship to what we are doing. Just think about the saints

for a moment. When they abandoned themselves to God, great things
appended, the fruits of grace rather than effort.

And this can be so for us today, when like Our Blessed Lady, we are open
to what the Lord wants to do through us.