

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)

“The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us; and we saw his glory.” (John 1:14ab). For centuries, Catholics have set the 25th of March aside as a special day. 9 months before the birth of Jesus, the Angel Gabriel announced that Mary was chosen to become the mother of Jesus. Mary was given a choice and she responded “yes.” “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived and, at Christmas, born of the Virgin Mary.

Mary is a model for all Christians. By her simple yes, and by a lifetime of faithful witness, she shows us how we can say yes and allow the Word of God to become flesh in our own bodies. We do not have the benefit of a personal invitation by the Archangel Gabriel. However, we do have the bible with its four Gospels, the letters of the Apostles, and the rich history of the Old Testament to help us reflect upon God and the mysteries of our faith.

At the Annunciation, Mary was greatly troubled by what the Angel said. To help her, Gabriel tells Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” Amidst the concerns and worries of the coronavirus, people may suffer from many fears.

Certainly, there is the fear of isolation and even a sense of going stir crazy as we try to self-isolate. I am reminded of my time in Little Diomedes over 5 years ago. My 5-day trip for a funeral turned into a marathon 39-day trip on the tiny island in the Bering Straits less than 3 miles from Russia’s Big Diomedes.

With the supply chain interrupted by lack of air transportation, the store soon ran out of essentials and it was anyone’s guess when things would return to normal for the 80 Diomedes’ who lived there at the time. I found enjoyment in the little rituals of life. I went to the store on a daily basis to see what items had run out. Thankfully, Pilot Bread and Krusteaz Pancake mix were in plentiful supply and never ran out.

Everyone was utterly helpless in terms of mobility. Through the telephone, I conducted a bare minimum of business. I was able to cancel my February trip to San Diego and get a full refund with Alaska Airlines. Likewise, I had to cancel my trip to Anchorage for the annual priest convocation. I kept in touch with my brother priests and offered the closing prayer to the annual convocation that I missed.

Each day I would check to see if the helicopter was repaired and see if there was a way back to Nome. Often time, the answer was “tomorrow.” Tomorrow would come and go but no helicopter arrived. The new answer was “in a day or two.” After the umpteenth broken promise of a helicopter ride back to Nome, I remember a woman telling me that it was ok to be upset. She wanted to see me respond with anger, but I only had laughter to share. Rather than vent at a problem I had no control over, I simply accepted that God placed me where he wanted me to be.

In hindsight, I found my 39 days on Little Diomedes to be the most peace filled and serene days of my priesthood. My prayer for you is that you can accept these days of slowing down as a gift from God. Trust in God, and when all else fails laugh at the things you cannot control.

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

Accept that God has placed you where he wants you to be this day and take time to thank him for your blessings.