



An Annunciation Message of Hope

On this Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Catholic bishops of Texas offer some words of living faith and hope to our people in this extraordinary time of anxiety and illness. While we are facing so many unknowns, we can be certain of God's faithfulness. The Annunciation of the Lord is a feast of hope in God's goodness and power to intervene on our behalf.

The *Magnificat*, the song of praise sung by our Lady at the Visitation with her cousin Elizabeth, is a song of hope. Our Blessed Mother is filled with God's grace. Her prayerful proclamation of complete dependence on and communion with God at the Annunciation inspires us all to rely on his grace, which will sustain us during this pandemic.

Together with our brothers and sisters around the world, we are threatened by the effects of this disease, and we must be united in our efforts to mitigate its spread. Our faith calls us all to follow Mary's example of trust and reliance on the Lord, and, most importantly, her living faith in the Lord.

The Blessed Virgin Mary sings of the fear of the Lord in her *Magnificat*, "He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation." As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote, "Perhaps this is a phrase with which we are not very familiar or perhaps we do not like it very much. But 'fear of the Lord' is not anguish; it is something quite different. It is the concern not to destroy the love on which our life is based. Fear of the Lord is that sense of responsibility that we are bound to possess for the portion of the world that has been entrusted to us in our lives."

Our actions to stay at home, to maintain safe physical distancing, and even to withdraw from public life during this time are a tangible witness of our reverence for life and our solidarity with the community. We do this, not because of servile fear, but because of Christian hope – we are sure of God's steadfast love and the promise of our salvation. By sacrificing for others and isolating ourselves for the common good, we witness our Christian hope that God will see us through the present darkness.

In their journey from the slavery of Egypt to the promised land, the people of Israel were rescued by passing together through the Red Sea. This moment is like our Red Sea. Only by trusting in God and remaining in solidarity with one another can we cross over and leave the terrible foe.

Remember, “Nothing is impossible for God.” Along with Mary in her Magnificat, we can all proclaim, “He has shown the strength of his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit; he has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty; he has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham, and his children forever.”

Hope and living faith in Jesus Christ are the antidote for all our fears, the answer to our futility and limitations, and opens the door to free us from the prison of our powerlessness and lack of control. We cannot love without hope.

As a people of hope, we know we have a future beyond this crisis. At this time of pandemic, we, the Catholic bishops of Texas, place our hope in the Lord and invite all the faithful to do the same.

We wait in joyful hope for the blessed day when the Church can return to the public celebration of the Mass with renewed appreciation for its divine beauty and power. We are grateful for the sacrifices all Texans are making for the common good. In a special way, we praise the dedicated efforts of medical personnel, first responders, caregivers, custodians, cashiers and clerks, family members, and charitable service volunteers. We celebrate and we are grateful for your efforts to protect one another as acts of *agape*, of genuine self-giving love. Through the grace of God, may our common sacrifice this Lent lead to new life in the victory of Christ.