

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons make connections to respect for human life on the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25). Parts of these reflections on the Annunciation can also be included in the homily the weekend prior to inform the parish community about this upcoming feast day. Brief notes are provided to introduce the congregation to the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of another ministry gathering.

Sunday Before the Solemnity of the Annunciation

This upcoming [insert day of week], the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at fertilization. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In anticipation of this great Marian feast day that highlights the humanity of all unborn children, we will be offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Expectant parents will be invited to rise, come forward, and receive this blessing upon their children.

[The Blessing of a Child in the Womb may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), or as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass. It may also be given outside the Mass, within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.]

March 25* Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11
Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10
Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14ab
Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

**The celebration of the Annunciation is sometimes transferred from March 25 in order to accommodate Lenten observances.*

The following sample homily is based on the reflections of Pope St. John Paul II in the conclusion of the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, nos. 102-105.

Today is the anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, also known as *The Gospel of Life*. This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life. It also addressed modern day threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide.

Issued on March 25, 1995, *The Gospel of Life* was prophetically put forward on this great Marian feast, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. Today's celebration of the Annunciation—as recalled in our Gospel reading—commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and the Word is made flesh.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In the conclusion of *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II offers a profound reflection on Mary, the Mother of God and the Annunciation. This homily is based largely on these reflections.

In the story of the Annunciation we see that “the one who accepted ‘Life’ in the name of all and for the sake of all was *Mary*, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the *Gospel of life*. Mary’s consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity.”²

Mary, in becoming the Mother of God, becomes the “mother of all who are reborn to life.”³ In a similar way, we also understand the Church to be our mother. By contemplating Mary’s motherhood, the Church “discovers the meaning of her own motherhood.”⁴ Mary’s experience as the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives us the “model of how life should be welcomed and cared for.”⁵

Like Mary, pregnant with the Christ-child, the Church “bears within herself the Savior of the world.”⁶ The Church “is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God’s own life.”⁷ But this great mission of the Church was only made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who bore Christ to the world through her very womb. Mary is therefore the model of the Church.

The motherhood of the Church is only realized through the labor pains of childbirth, meaning that the Church is “in constant tension with the forces of evil”⁸ and performs her saving mission amid sin, suffering, injustice, and death. But, “like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering.”⁹ Her own heart

was pierced. Mary’s “‘yes’ spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross,”¹⁰ when Mary gives her Son over to death, and becomes the Mother of the Church.

We know that the life of the Christ-child was threatened long before Calvary. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to protect the life of the infant Jesus from Herod’s plans to kill him. Mary “helps the Church to realize that life is always at the center of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness.”¹¹ The vulnerable infant Jesus represents “every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened.”¹² Because Christ in taking on flesh has united Himself with every human person, we come to understand that “rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ”¹⁵ himself.

Despite the great number of threats to human life in our world today, we still have hope. Pope St. John Paul II highlights the angel’s announcement to Mary, which “is framed by these reassuring words: ‘Do not be afraid, Mary’ and ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother’s life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.”¹⁴ Therefore, “*Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church* [emphasis added] in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.”¹⁵ The battle for life has already been won. By his blood, Christ has won salvation for us.

So, we must look to Mary and entrust the cause of life to her tender care and intercession. We are called to be a people of life and for life. We ask the Blessed Mother, through her intercession, to “grant that all who believe in [her] Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time.”¹⁶

May we answer Pope St. John Paul II’s “pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!*” (emphasis added).¹⁷



1 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 105.

2 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 102.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 103

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 104

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 105.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 5.

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