



Fifth week of Lent with reference to the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord  
25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> March 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“I am the Resurrection and the Life” says the Lord*

This past week we have celebrated Mother’s Day: a day we show that we cherish our mothers by sending cards, visiting, taking flowers and gathering as families when possible. It is a lovely celebration, but I am sure not many would realise today that Mother’s Day is connected to the Feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, the day the Angel Gabriel told Mary she was to become the Mother of Jesus. Mary asked how this was to come about as she was a virgin. The Angel responded *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God”*. From early times this Feast of the Incarnation was kept across the Church in East and West. It was celebrated close to the spring equinox on 25 March marking both God’s act of creation, and re-creation in Christ. And, of course, it is about 9 months from Christmas Day, the birth of Jesus, whose conception is marked on 25 March.

Mothering Sunday, also spoken of as “Lady Day”, goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century in England (you may have noted it is in May in America) when people went back to the Church of their Baptism, known as “Mother Church”. As time passed the commercial opportunity presented by Mother’s Day here began to predominate and the link to “Our Lady’s” Day the Church of Baptism and rebirth has been lost, though in itself the Day is a wonderful celebration of Motherhood and Family which the Church cherishes.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation this weekend presents us with an opportunity to remember and cherish Mary as our mother too. This is particularly relevant in England where her National Shrine in Walsingham is based on the apparition of Our Lady to Richeldis de Faverches in 1031; she led her in spirit to the house in Nazareth where the Angel had greeted her. Mary asked her to erect another one like it in Walsingham. According to the text in the Pynson Ballad (c1485) Mary said: *“It shall be a perpetual memorial to the great joy of the Annunciation, ground and origin of all my joys and the root of humanity’s gracious Redemption”*. Many, including myself, will be in Walsingham on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March. The Bishop of the Diocese, Peter Collins, will Preside at the concelebrated Mass.

On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> the Mass will be the Fifth Sunday of Lent, when we hear the account of the raising of Lazarus from death in the Gospel for the day – St John Chapter 11. In this miracle we see the power Jesus has over death. Just as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus so we are told in St Paul’s Letter to the Romans *“the Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him”*. Those looking forward to Baptism at Easter are being

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prepared to experience the power of this Sacrament. The Collect Prayer for the Third Scrutiny this Sunday reads:

*“Grant, O Lord, to these chosen ones that, instructed in the holy mysteries, they may receive new life at the point of Baptism and be numbered among the members of Your Church”.*

The raising of Lazarus foreshadows Jesus’ own Resurrection: we, together with the catechumens, are being invited to reflect on Baptism as a dying and rising in Jesus. With Martha and Mary, we are all called to respond to the question Jesus asks at the raising of Lazarus: *“I am the resurrection, if anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*. Martha said, *“Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who has come into this world”*.

What began with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Mary at the Annunciation, is to be fulfilled through the raising of Jesus in the power of the same Spirit at Easter.

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