



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Lady Day (8th April) 2024

To an un-cultured philistine such as myself, as one wanders around Rome or Florence or Venice, it is tempting to think that there is rather a surfeit of depictions of the Annunciation. When I was Vicar of Florence, it seemed that I could not raise my eyes without seeing yet another scene of the events commemorated by today's feast.

Yet, in fact, they are not really all the same; each has its own perspective on the narrative - often interwoven with other considerations. One of my favourites portrays Mary as a Renaissance aristocratic woman at her prayers in her boudoir, the Tuscan hills visible through the window behind her. On her knee is a Book of Hours, open at the Angelus as the Archangel Gabriel appears to her.

On the surface, this is an almost ridiculous image: it is all wrong: the clothes are wrong, the location is wrong, the status of the woman is wrong and most bizarre of all, she is using a devotion based on events, which are just about to transpire: an instance, perhaps, of a proleptic liturgical formulary.

However, if we look through the veil of this accumulation of ahistorical detail, we actually see an important theological truth. The Annunciation was not a transient event, which disappeared almost as soon as it occurred. Rather, it has an eternal reality. Mary's *Fiat Mihi* was written into the divine Purpose from the outset; whilst it was freely given, there had never been a prospect that it would not be freely given.

Mary's acquiescence in the divine Will is, so to speak, part of Christ's DNA and when we meet Him, we find as part of that encounter the Annunciation, which has an enduring reality in the Humanity of Christ.

In many ways, this leads us into a profound aspect of the Incarnation: that Mary's presence in the divine Mystery of God's Being is not confined to Christ's thirty years amongst us dwelling, coming to an end when the risen Christ divested Himself of His Body. Just as all human beings are more than their bodies, so also the humanity of Christ. Although He is no longer confined to His earthly Body, we should not infer from this that He has laid aside all aspects of His incarnate humanity.

The obedience to the divine Will, through which Christ's humanity entered the world, has been inherited by Mary's Son and is a central element of His identity, as it was for His Mother. Whenever we encounter Christ, we brush up against His humanity totally orientated to the divine Will, which is also part of His identity.

Today, therefore, we do not just commemorate an event, but an enduring phenomenon: pristine humanity totally in harmony with the Will of God: inaugurated in the realms of time as Mary spoke her *Fiat Mihi* and the life of the incarnate Christ began its course.