

RETREAT HOMILY

48th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion

Opening Mass - 07 October 2024

“Contemplando il Bambino Gesù che dorme sulla croce, tu devi imparare a dormire interiormente nella croce della sofferenza in dolce silenzio, in fede e in perseverante pazienza”.

“Contemplating the Child Jesus sleeping on the cross, you must learn to sleep inwardly on the cross of suffering in sweet silence, in faith and in persevering patience.”-St. Paul of the Cross

Dear brothers and sisters in the Passion of Christ and in the Passion of humanity:

During this day, we gather to reflect on one of the most profound and moving aspects of our faith and our fraternity-- the mysteries of Christ's Passion. But in today's Mass, we will do so in a slightly unusual way. Let us examine these mysteries through the lens of the Annunciation as proposed to us in today's liturgy, expressed in the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38.

At first glance, it may seem to be an odd connection. After all, the Annunciation marks the beginning of Jesus' earthly life, while the Passion marks its end. However, if we look more closely, we will see how these two moments are deeply interconnected in the divine plan of salvation and in the daily practice of our ministry.

Let us begin by recalling the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary-- "Rejoice, full of grace! The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). These words of greeting are not mere courtesy. They announce a profound joy, but also a mission of immense weight and future sorrows. Mary, in her humility, is troubled and wonders what such a greeting could mean.

The angel continues-- "Mary, do not be afraid for you have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb and bear a

son, and you shall name him Jesus" (Lk 1:30-31). Here we see the first parallel with the Passion. Mary is called not to fear in light of this surprising announcement. Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, faces his own fear before the imminent cross.

Mary, in her innocence, asks-- "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man" (Lk 1:34). This question is not a question of doubt, but a search for understanding. In the same way, Jesus, in his humanity, seeks to understand the will of the Father, praying in the form of a cry-- "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me" (Lk 22:42).

The angel's response to Mary is profound-- "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35). That same Holy Spirit who made the Incarnation possible is the one who sustained Jesus throughout his life and especially during his Passion. In the most difficult moments of the cross, when Jesus cried out-- "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), we see the culmination of this power of the Most High.

The central point of the Annunciation and of the Passion is the response of total surrender to the will of God. Mary responds-- "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). This "yes" of Mary echoes the "yes" that Jesus would give throughout his life, culminating in his Passion when he says-- "Not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42).

This unconditional "yes" is the core of the mystery of the Passion. It is the acceptance of the divine plan, regardless of the personal cost. Mary, in accepting to be the mother of the Savior, was already anticipating in some way the cross that her son would bear. She did not know exactly what the future held in store for her, but she trusted fully in God.

When we reflect on the Passion of Christ, we cannot forget the suffering of his mother. At the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Simeon prophesied to Mary-- "a sword will pierce your soul" (Lk 2:35). This prophecy is fully fulfilled at the foot of the cross. Mary's sorrow, foreseen from the beginning, reminds us that the mysteries of the Passion are not limited exclusively to the physical suffering of Jesus, but also embrace the emotional and spiritual suffering of all those who loved him.

Brothers and sisters: the Annunciation is not only the announcement of the birth of the Savior, but also the prelude to a journey of sorrow and redemption. Mary, in saying "yes" to God, not only accepted to be the mother of Jesus, but also accepted the whole divine plan, including the suffering that was to come.

As children and missionaries of the Passion, this parallel between the Annunciation and the Passion teaches us several important lessons:

First: The importance of trust in God. Both Mary and Jesus fully trusted in God's plan, even when they did not fully understand it.

Second: The role of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who made the Incarnation possible sustained Jesus during his Passion and continues to sustain us in our own trials.

Third: The value of "yes" to God. Saying "yes" to God is not always easy and may involve suffering, but it is the path to the realization of God's plan in our lives and in our communities.

Fourth: The interconnection between joy and suffering. The joy of the Annunciation and the pain of the Passion are not opposites, but interconnected parts of the plan of salvation.

Fifth: The mystery of divine love. In both the Annunciation and the Passion, we see God's incredible love manifested, a love willing to become incarnate and suffer for us.

Brothers and sisters: the mysteries of Christ's Passion, seen in the light of the Annunciation, reveal God's extraordinary love for us. From the moment the Word became flesh in Mary's womb to the moment Jesus gave up his spirit on the Cross, we see a divine plan unfolding-- a plan of love, sacrifice and redemption.

Like Mary, may we be able to say "yes" to God's will in our lives, even when we do not fully understand it. Like Jesus may we accept our daily crosses, trusting that the Father is with us even in the most difficult moments. And may the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed Mary and sustained Jesus on the cross, strengthen us in our journey of faith.

May the contemplation of these mysteries-from the Annunciation to the Passion-inspire us to live Christ's love more fully in our daily lives. May we be living witnesses to this love, bringing hope and compassion to a world in need.

And may Mary, who was present from the Annunciation to the cross, intercede for us so that we may have the same courage and faith that she demonstrated.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us conclude this reflection with a prayer:

Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary, Mother of God and our Mother, you who knew how to discern and accept the will of the Father with great faith and courage, intercede for us. Help us to be attentive to God's signs in our lives, to seek his will with sincerity and to respond generously to his call in our daily sufferings and joys. Amen!