

**Homily Outline for Mass with Senior Priests
Villa Maria Retreat Center
December 20, 2023**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

I. Annunciation

- A. Lk says that Gabriel's first word on coming to Mary was *chaire*, (Greek for rejoice!).
- B. Neither the Latin *Ave* nor the English *Hail* quite carry the connotation of wishing someone happiness or joyful well-being.
- C. Gabriel significantly adds, "do not be afraid," for any encounter with the divine leads to awe, surprise, or uncertainty – as was the case here for Mary..

II. From a homily In Praise of the Virgin Mother by Saint Bernard, abbot
(Hom. 4:8-9; *Opera omnia*, Edit Cisterc 4. [1966], 53-54)

You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us. . . .

Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word.

Why do you delay, why are you afraid? Believe, give praise, and receive. Let humility be bold, let modesty be confident. This is no time for virginal simplicity to forget prudence. In this matter alone, O prudent Virgin, do not fear to be presumptuous. Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more necessary. Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open. Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, she says, be it done to me according to your word.*

III. May God give us this grace. Amen.