

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Thursday, Third Week of Advent

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Mass for Catholic Center Employees
Dec. 20, 2018

Introduction: Edward R. Murrow - *See It Now*

An early television news magazine, dating to the 1950s, was a program entitled, *See It Now* - a program so old that even I don't remember watching it. It was the creation of the famed CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow, and the idea was to bring the viewer to the scene of the action, to make the viewer almost a participant in the momentous events of the day.

For example, a 1952 broadcast entitled "Christmas in Korea" brought the war in Korea into the living rooms of millions of Americans. As Murrow interviewed soldiers engaged in mortal combat, the savagery of that war became clear to a vast TV audience.

Today we take that kind of broadcast journalism for granted but back in the day it was truly groundbreaking.

Bernard of Clairvaux: *See It Now*

Back in the 12th century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux did his own version of *See It Now*. Using a pen the way a technician might use a mobile TV camera, St. Bernard brings us to the scene of the Annunciation. So artful is he in describing this great event in the history of salvation, that we are led to believe that we too are *seeing it*

now.

Put another way, St. Bernard gives us a front row seat as the Angel Gabriel appears to the Blessed Virgin Mary to ask her if she would consent to become the Mother of the Savior.

With the consummate skill of a reporter, Bernard brings us into the room just after the Angel had posed that all-important question to Mary. He alerts us to the everlasting significance of that fleeting moment in time - "The angel awaits an answer," he says to Mary, "it is time for him to return to God who sent him."

But St. Bernard does not stop there; he goes on to say: "We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us."

See how St. Bernard draws you and me into the deepest reality of the event.

But Bernard has not yet finished assembling his audience. As if speaking to the astonished Virgin Mary - just now taking in the news that she was chosen to be the Mother of the Messiah - Bernard proceeds to tell her why her answer is so crucial to humanity, and who else is awaiting her response to the Angel's question.

"The price of our salvation is offered to you, [Mary]," he says, "We shall be set free at once if you consent."

And he adds, "Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin... 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."

In recreating the drama of the Annunciation, St. Bernard has us hanging on Mary's

every word. We can almost feel our own pulse accelerate as he says to the Blessed Mother, “Rely in haste to the angel...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.”

St. Bernard does not hesitate to remind Mary what would happen if, in her modesty and humility, she were to allow the moment to pass.

“See,” he says to her, “the desired of the nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow would you begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open,” he says to her!

And in this breathless moment, Mary replies to the Angel: “[And] behold, the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.”

Our Version: See It Now

Bernard did not recreate the scene of the Annunciation merely to entertain us, merely to delight us, or even to amaze us.

No, St. Bernard, like every good reporter, had a deeper motive in mind. He wanted to bring the reality of the Annunciation home to us, not merely in our living rooms and family rooms but indeed into the interior rooms of our minds and hearts.

There he wished us to relive that pivotal moment when the Blessed Virgin Mary’s consent to the angel unleashed the great events that continue to bring us new life in and through her Son - his Incarnation, his teaching and miracles, his death, resurrection and exaltation.

And what does that mean to us except that Christ is knocking at our door. Even as we expect him, await him, look for him, with vigilant prayer and joyful hope, behold,

the Lord is already at the doorstep of our souls asking that we would consent to conceive him anew in our hearts, asking that we would allow him to live in us even as he dwelt in Mary.

And surely the Lord wants to come and live in us because he loves us and wants nothing more than our redemption from sin.

But just as surely the Lord wants to come and live in us because he wants us also to be the portals through which he enters the world again and again and again, there to touch the lives of those who are the tearful descendants of Adam, those “who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

He want us to be instruments in guiding their feet “into the way of peace.

Let us not underestimate how many are awaiting *our* word of consent. So many who are waiting to hear the Good News of salvation. So many who are waiting to be reconciled to God and to the Church. So many who await a word of compassion and the restoration of their dignity. So many who await a word of remorse and healing from us.

May we be guided and may we guide others into the way of peace!

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the year 2018 has proven to be difficult. It has proven to be a year when the pain of our institutional sins and failings have afflicted the Church afresh.

I know this is not easy for you, just as it is not easy for me.

You have been on the front lines of all this even as you have worked with dedication and love to advance the Church’s mission.

For this and for so much more I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

This Christmas Eve, as we peer into the crèche and gaze upon the Christ-Child, the Child of Mary's womb, the fruit of her consent to the Father's loving plan, may we see on the face of that Child the promise of a new beginning, a new beginning in the life of the Church and newness of life for ourselves, our families, and all those whom we are privileged to serve in his Name.

And may God bless us and keep us always in His love!