

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT. 2026

I am the Resurrection and Life; whoever believes in Me, even though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.
(John 11:25)

The Church sings these words of our Lord at Lauds (Morning Prayer) before every Funeral Mass, and sometimes at the graveside, as the remains of the deceased are interred. Jesus Himself is the Resurrection, which is a Person before it is an event. Jesus Christ is the Resurrection because He is the Eternal Son of God, Second Person of the All Holy and Everlasting Trinity, Who truly assumed a human nature through Blessed Mary, the Virgin. As true Man, He experienced human death. As true God, he conquered human death. All who die united to Him will experience the Resurrection, because He is the Resurrection. Lazarus in today's Gospel had a miraculous resuscitation, not the Resurrection. He was raised up only to resume his mortal life, and some day he would die again. On Easter, Jesus Christ, simply because of Who He is, experienced the Resurrection. Jesus did not resume a mortal life, but entered, now as True Man as well as True God, into life with God. He will die no more. Rather, as the Resurrection, He shares Resurrection with all who, by Faith and by Baptism, by the Eucharist and by Good Works, belong to Him.

The One Who is the Resurrection and the Life comes to us through Blessed Mary, the Virgin-Mother. I will be at the Diocesan Clergy Institute in Casper and won't be able to celebrate it properly, but March 25, nine months before Christmas, is the Feast of the Annunciation, the wondrous day on which, after Mother Mary gave her response of "Let it Be" to the Archangel's message, the Eternal Son of God was conceived within her as truly the Son of Man, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The One Who is the Resurrection and the Life comes to us through Mary.

Other Saints were inspired by Christ. Other Saints were mightily influenced by Christ. Other Saints came to know Jesus Christ mystically through Faith. Holy Mary is different from them all. Christ, having no human father, took His Human Nature entirely from Mary. With Mary, Jesus Christ had, and forever has, an entirely unique relationship.

I admit that it is hard to speak correctly of the Virgin Mother Mary. Though by nature part of the sinful human race, God's loving Predestination, operating from beyond the confines of time, applied to her the saving work of her Son, and thereby lifted her above the condition of sin. Though only a human being and nothing more, she, by virtue of God making her "full of Grace", is the greatest of mere human beings. Mary's unique status is difficult for us to describe. Some people, carried away by enthusiasm, use expressions about her that are inappropriate for a mere human being. Other people, cramped by suspicion, refuse to use the expressions about her that are appropriate for the greatest of mere human beings. How can we speak of her without avoiding either of these errors?

The solution, I think, is never to speak of the Savior's Blessed Mother without also speaking of her Son, the Word made Flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ. All of her merely human greatness comes from being chosen by God to be the Mother of the One Who is human but not merely human, the Incarnate Son of God. The March 25 feast of the Annunciation is a good example of doing this. The feast honors Mary, but it mainly celebrates the wonder of the

Incarnation, the conception of the Son of God as true Man within her blessed womb. Authentically Christian devotion to Mary focuses intensely on how, through her, Christ truly partakes of Human Nature. Through her, Christ is a Man like us, in all things but sin. Through her and with her cooperation, Christ became our Brother.

Mary cooperated quietly with the unique graces God gave her. Many people, probably most, have hardened hearts. They will not cooperate with God's graces until they are humbled by suffering, pain, and defeat. Mary's case, and that of some other saints, reminds us that this is not always the case. It is possible to be well schooled in holy humility simply through daily hearing of God's word and daily union with God in prayer. Thus, Mary was well prepared to say her "Let it Be" to the Archangel; and at the moment she did so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word became Flesh, and dwelt among us, conceived as Man in her holy womb.

God gives us His Holy Spirit quietly, and all that is necessary for our Salvation is daily cooperation with His Holy Spirit through saving Faith and faithful performance of our daily duties. This was the way of Mary. She preached no sermons. She performed no miracles. She became holy, "Full of Grace", through quiet and daily cooperation with God's Spirit, trusting in God and doing her duty.

Many people, probably most, including many of the Saints, have been able to come to holiness only after God has broken their heart hardening and ear closing pride through some chastisement. Chastisement, repentance, contrition, and absolution, is the cycle of Israel's life in the Holy Scriptures. Israel went through this cycle more than once. Most of the Lord's disciples, it seems, have to go through this cycle more than once. Yet, there are disciples of the Lord Who have never defiled themselves through grave sin. Among these, Mary is the greatest, strong in the Spirit and mighty by her Lord's strength. Zechariah doubted the Archangel's message, but Mary did not. Abraham wavered in his Faith God's promises, but Mary never did. In time, a sword of sorrow did pierce her heart, but it was not sorrow for her sins. It was sorrow that participated in her Son's sorrows, as she stood beside the Cross, the Cross that her Son made the Altar of Sacrifice for the sin offering that takes away the sins of the world.

If we have, by God's Grace, preserved ourselves from grave sin, let us give hearty thanks to God, Who made this possible. If we have fallen into grave sin, let us immediately repent, confess, and seek absolution.

There will be a point at which there is no more time for repentance, confession, and absolution. Romans 8:8 warns that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." The "flesh" in this passage means the normal human way of doing things, in which grave sins are treated as minor mistakes, if even that. If, when our mortal life ends, we are still in "the flesh", still living in grave sin, we will see the Lord as He truly is, and shudder with terror, for eyes accustomed to sin cannot bear the revelation of God's holiness.

If, however, we have, even late, put off the flesh and lived in God's Spirit, we shall see the Lord of glory with excitement and delight. We shall see Him, with His Blessed Mother and all the Saints. We shall experience what the Lord Jesus came to give us, life to the full and forever, as God's prophetic word in Ezekiel 37:12 is fulfilled, "I will open your graves, and have you rise from them."