The story of Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth has long been cherished among Christians and is included among the mysteries of the rosary. This scene presents two holy women, and between them, yet unborn but fully alive, are the great prophet and the Messiah. Mary is carrying in her womb the Lord Jesus. Do you remember the Ark of the Covenant from the Old Testament? It was the place of God’s presence on earth — Here, now, God is present in the womb of Mary, and she becomes a new ark for God! On the lips of both women are ancient praises that evoke some of the depths of ancient Israel’s wisdom and salvation history. The imagery of Mary with the Christ Child in the womb, who goes out while pregnant to help her elder cousin, has perfectly human overtures to the greatness of the human experience.

These two women, forgotten and overlooked in their day, are symbolic of the countless millions of women who have brought children into the world amid many personal hardships and through intense love. These women are the hidden building blocks of the world. Motherhood, often downplayed, chided, or mocked in the secular world, will get its due, not nearly enough in this world, but fully in heaven. Maybe it will not so much be the great patriarchs of salvation history who will be very near the throne of God, but the hidden matriarchs who loved more, sacrificed more, and were more faithful to God. Greatness and holiness are not always where you expect to find it, such as in the Jerusalem Temple; for at the time the temple in Jerusalem had nothing to offer the world. Yet, in the womb of this poor maiden, lost in the hills north of the Holy City, we find God, hidden and real. Later in the manger, in a forgotten stable, the Son of God will lie asleep.

Today this reading is also to be read as an invitation to each of us. Like Mary, we are all called in a sense to be an ark for God. What does Mary do at the moment of the Annunciation? She does not sit back and relax; becoming self-centered, even if she had every right to do so — she becomes a servant, a messenger of joy; she does not keep the Good News to herself. When we worthily receive the Eucharist at holy Mass, we truly carry Christ with us in sacramental form; we become an ark for God — a Tabernacle. Mary was an Ark for God; in her gentle, motherly way, she helps us to become more worthy of being the temples of the Holy Spirit and the living tabernacles of the Eucharist that we are. As we get closer to the moment of Christmas, the Lord is drawing near.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen penned this line: “Every artist has the feeling of being at home in his studio, every patriot at home in his own country, and every man at home in his house. One should therefore expect that the Creator would be at home

in His own creation, and that God would be at home in the world He had made. And yet the most startling fact of human history is that when God came to earth, He was homeless at home.” (Arbp. Fulton Sheen). There was simply no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph. The story of Christmas begs us to open our hearts to Jesus. There is nothing sadder than a person who at the end of their life never made room for Jesus in their heart. In Bethlehem, if Roman soldiers came to the inn, they would be welcomed. If rich or powerful men came, they would be welcome. All those dressed in fine purple and soft garments had room in the inn. Mary and Joseph had to go to the stable, the last place you would expect to find a king.

We expect to find a king in a palace, in a castle, surrounded by adoring throngs of subjects and soldiers. And yet Jesus is in the stable, with the animals and a few shepherds. Holiness is not always where you may expect to find it. Jesus may be hidden in that annoying neighbor, that elderly parent, that crying toddler — He is asking for your love! Sheen finishes by saying, “No one would have expected that […] He who could make a canopy of stars would be shielded from a stormy sky by the roof of a stable; or that He who made the earth as His future home would be homeless at home. No one would have expected to find Divinity in such a condition; but that is because Divinity is always where you least expect to find it.” (Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen)

We can provide a home, a suitable home for Jesus if we finish preparing and if we ask for and desire humility — laying aside our prideful ways and simply turning over to Christ the Lordship over our lives. Jesus has already completed his mission by obedience. But we are still in the middle of our mission. In us, the battle between good and evil still rages. Every day, in fact, we are faced with the choice that Adam faced in the Garden of Eden: will we seek our happiness and fulfillment

by following God's commands, or by putting them aside? If we put them aside, we may experience moments of pleasure, but we will never experience the deep interior peace for which we long, that the saints discovered.

Today, as Advent draws closer to Christmas, may we choose to leave our rebellions behind, uniting our hearts to Christ's heart, echoing his saving “yes” with our sincere “amen,” which is the Hebrew word for “yes, I agree, so be it.” There is no better place to do so than at Mass. In fact, the whole point of the Mass, Jesus’ most precious gift to the Church, is exactly that. When Jesus walked the earth, he said "yes" to the Father with every step he took, especially his steps to the cross. And his every "yes" repaired the damage done by all our "nos." He knew our weakness; He knew that even if we wanted and tried to follow his example, at times we would still give in to temptation, still continue to say “no” to God — and leave Him homeless.

He instituted the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where his own all-powerful yes is made present every day, on every altar. When we come to Mass, then, we can lay our weak yeses, and even our rebellious nos, on that same altar, so that they can be swept up into the perfect obedience of our Savior — a true and humble home. In the Mass, if we live it from our hearts, his obedience becomes our obedience, and he becomes our peace. William of St. Thierry, an abbot wrote: He taught us to love him by first loving us, *even to death on the cross.* By loving us and holding us so dear, he stirred us to love him who had first loved us to the end. And this is clearly the reason: you first loved us so that we might love you—not because you needed our love, but because we could not be what you created us to be, except by loving you. You know that this disposition could not be forced on our hearts, my God, since you created us; it must rather be elicited. And this, for the further reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness. (William of St. Thierry). May we joyfully and diligently prepare to welcome Him home.