

Homily New Year's Day

Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God. Theme: Holy Mary, Mother of God is our beloved Mother Also

As I stated in my New Year's Message, it is a great blessing to begin our New Year every year with the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. This solemnity was instituted in 1970 by Pope Paul VI. In Pope Paul VI's encyclical entitled *Marialis Cultus* issued on Feb 2, 1974, he gave liturgical guidelines for devotions to Mary by the Church. He explains: "This celebration assigned to January 1 in conformity with the ancient liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the Holy Mother... Through whom we were found worthy.... To receive the author of Life." But the title "Theotokos" meaning the Mother of God or God Bearer can be traced at least as far back as the third century and was first sanctioned at the Council of Ephesus (AD.431).

On this New Year's day, we also celebrate the World Day Prayer for Peace. As we all know, Queen of Peace is one of the titles of Mother Mary. It is therefore fitting for the Church on the day we celebrate the solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, we also pray for world peace. Beloved, the wars in Ukraine, Palestine, and certain parts in the world and problems in some families, communities



etc. call our attention to turn to our Mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, to pray for peace for us. Each and every one of us can be an instrument of God's peace. How are we instruments of peace in our own family, church, workplaces? Remember Jesus' reward for peacemakers: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Let us make the Prayer for Peace of St. Francis of Assisi our daily prayer throughout this New Year: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For, it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." AMEN!

Reading throughout the readings of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, there is no direct reference to her as the Mother of God. St. Paul tells us in the second reading: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." That is say, Jesus was thoroughly human with the love, care, education personality of his mother. He was also fully divine. If Jesus is God the Son and if Mary gave birth to Him, God the Son, no wonder the Church gave her the title "Mother of God"- "Theotokos." It is very easy to understand it because we call a mom of a doctor, doctor's mom or a teacher's mom that is a daughter/son of a teacher.

Here are some few lessons we may reflect on during this New Year and perhaps add it to our New Year's resolutions:

First lesson: Do you notice that all three readings contain God's abundant blessings? We hear of the Aaronic or Priestly blessing in the first reading. In the second reading, through the birth of Jesus, we all are adopted children of God, meaning we are blessed to be children of God. God blessed the shepherds to be the first recipients of the Good News of the birth of Jesus and to deliver it to Mary, Joseph, and their community.

Second lesson: As you heard in the Gospel reading, the Good News of the nativity of Jesus was first announced to the shepherds, low class people during the time of Joseph and Mary. Similarly, God still needs ordinary people like each one of us to continue to spread the Good News of His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world. When you hear the Word of God, do you receive it with joy and a grateful heart like the shepherds? Do you share it with your family and others in your community?

Thirdly, St. Luke tells us "...Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." Yes, Mary did not understand the ramifications of God's plan, yet she kept it and pondered on it in her heart throughout her life. With faith in God, nothing is impossible. Like Mother Mary, there are many things in our life that we may not understand, but with faith in God, nothing is impossible for God. All that Jesus asks of us is that our faith must be like the size of a mustard seed, and we can move mountains.

Final lesson is the place of the nativity of Jesus. Jesus, the King of kings, had no room except in a manger. Beloved, are you willing and ready to open the room of your heart to him? Jesus tells us: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev: 3:20). We know for sure that no one can have any meaningful and purposeful life without placing Jesus in the center of his/her life. I hope and pray that in this New Year we will all invite Jesus daily to be the center of our life.

I pray the Aaronic/Priestly blessing you heard in the first reading upon you and your families: "The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!" Wishing you and all your families, the abundant blessings of God throughout this New Year and beyond. Amen !