

Mary, Mother of God - New Year's Day - Year A
"Pray, Bless and Praise"
(Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

Ritual, Theology and Narrative: these three words succinctly describe the three readings for today.

In essence, they call us to bless one another; pray like Mary, and worship God like the shepherds.

As we begin this New Year, it seems appropriate to think about blessings. The ritual of blessing things and people is one of the ways that popular religion lives on in our day.

The word blessing comes from the Latin "benedicere", to speak well of, someone or some thing. To bless is to affirm, to build up, to see the good and the positive in the other, in the end, to love that person in a very sincere and personal way.

Ron Rolheiser, noted Oblate theologian and author, shares how when he left for the seminary, his parents had him kneel on the kitchen floor, placed their hands on him, and blessed him. That special moment has stayed with him and empowers him to this day.

He mentions that Jean val Jean, in the musical "Les Miserables" is a beautiful example of blessing. As an old man, Jean goes out to the front lines of the revolutionary confrontation in Paris, looking for the young man his adopted daughter plans to marry. He finds him asleep and prays to God that he might be safe. He asks God to take his own life because he is old and has lived long, and to spare this young man who will take his daughter away from him, because he is young and has his life ahead of him. This is the blessing of a grandfather – to step back, let the younger one shine, be generative and empower the youth.

I remember a Search weekend when one of the participants did not have a letter from her parents and family which is an important part of the event. This girl suffered from extreme shyness and was unable to speak in school until she reached grade nine. There she was affirmed, blessed, by a very caring teacher who patiently encouraged her, drew out of her the suffering she had undergone, and got her to start talking. Aware of how painful it would be for her if she did not receive a letter with the others, I personally went to obtain a letter from her family. Their reaction was "Why do we have to write her a letter?" I actually dictated a letter to her brother which included a phrase like "We know that we don't show it often but we do love you." When she received that letter during the weekend, she went into shock and could not speak again for some time. When I asked her about that later, she said that she had never in her life heard anyone in her family speak to her in that way. She had never been blessed by her family, and was starving for affection. That letter was their first blessing to her.

AS Christians, we must be about affirming and blessing one another as God has blessed us in Christ. The psalm is a beautiful prayer that God will be gracious to us and bless us with mercy. The second reading goes on to describe the theology of that blessing. In Christ God has redeemed us. Redemption is all about being forgiven through the death and resurrection of Christ. In Christ, we have been adopted as children of God. Adoption is all about belonging and birthright. We have become children of God and heirs to the kingdom through faith and baptism. We are truly loved and blessed by our God.

A couple who are friends of mine adopted two boys after they found out they could not have children of their own. I am constantly amazed and in awe at how they are living out that adoption; how they have taken those two boys as their own through thick and thin. It is to those two adopted boys that they will leave their inheritance. Adoption as they are living it speaks to me very strongly of what it means that God has adopted us in Christ, blessed us in Christ, with all that God can give us – peace, joy, intimate union, eternal life. What a blessing is ours in Christ.

The Gospel simply provides the narrative, the human touch to the theology of blessing, redemption and adoption in Christ. That beautiful story of the birth of Jesus touches human hearts throughout the ages. The response of Mary and the shepherds to this tremendous blessing of God in the child Jesus is a call to us to respond in like fashion. We must also take this mystery to heart and ponder it in prayerful silence. And we must also follow the example of the shepherds, witnessing to all about this event, and then living lives of praise and worship, precisely what we are gathered here to do today.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is in itself another of God's greatest blessings. The love of God that blesses us, revealed to us through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is made present to us today through word and sacrament. We are truly blessed with healing, forgiveness and love. We are empowered to go out to ponder this mystery like Mary, and to be a blessing to the world. We are sent out to witness to others about this great event, and to give praise and glory to our God like the shepherds.

So remember, in Christ God has truly loved us and blessed us. Let us now prayerfully ponder this great love like Mary. Let us also bless one another by witnessing to this great mystery and leading lives of praise and worship like the shepherds.

NEW YEAR'S HOMILY – YEAR C
“Humble Faith – Key to the Kingdom”
(Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

Do you want to deepen your experience of the Kingdom of God?

Be like Mary – full of humble faith.

At Bethlehem we witness the scandal that God came into human history completely helpless, as a newborn. He could have come in power and glory, but instead slipped almost unnoticed into a small province in a forgotten corner of the world to a poor young couple, unwed or only recently married. There were no elaborate preparations for this birth – God was born on the road. The crib was a feeding trough, and those who came to visit were shepherds, not kings. By entering human history in this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor and the homeless. Among them, God could do divine work. A humility born of need is the necessary requirement for entry into this new kingdom.

The Christmas story tells the birth of a new king. Though the world was ruled by Caesar Augustus who was known as a peacemaker, real peace on earth would be realized only through the sovereignty of the child born in Bethlehem. The birth reveals a new world order, a world not under Caesar but under the direction of God's design for the redemption of all peoples. In this world, God's Word is heard by the humble. There is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the poor and the oppressed, and those who heard what God was doing were filled with joy. God has not forgotten us nor abandoned us in the brokenness that we have created for ourselves. The story of Christmas is, therefore, *both an announcement of hope, and a call to deep humility.*

Mary was above all an example of humble, obedient faith. She belonged to the poor of Jesus' day; the marginalized and the oppressed. She was at home in a stable and on a donkey, the lot of the very poor, even destitute. She welcomed animals and shepherds, the lowest of occupations, to the stable when Jesus was born. To be humble is to know who we are, our qualities as well as our defects, to be in touch with our true selves, to not wear masks or pretence. Mary was humble, and God was able to work in her as in no other. With humility like Mary's God will also work in us and we will be able to share how God is at work in us with the world.

Once I had an opportunity to experience a facilitated growth experience with a renewal group. We were shown a gym with ropes criss-crossing it at a height of about six feet. We were told that we would be blindfolded and given five minutes to find a key, without being allowed to talk with anyone. If someone found the key or got into any trouble, they were to raise their arm as a sign to the facilitator.

I started off following one rope, determined to be the first to find the key. After bumping into a couple other participants going in the opposite direction, I decided it could not be a

key taped to the rope. It must be a trick, or a puzzle – perhaps a key word. Given my experience with the Twelve Step program, I rather proudly put up my hand numerous times to offer my solutions – words such as “humility”, “cooperation”, “teamwork”, “helping each other.” None of my answers were right and suddenly the time was up. I was disappointed and somewhat frustrated.

As we debriefed the experience, we discovered that only one person had succeeded to find the key. He had run into a wall, and being rather emotional, started to cry. When asked if he was okay by a facilitator, he replied that he needed help. That was the key – asking for help. When I realized this, I felt ashamed and even afraid – here I was, teaching others how to go on healing journeys, yet I was unable to ask for help for myself. I was too proud. That awareness was a wake up call for me, a deep lesson in my own need to grow in humility, a humility that is the key to the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a meal that demands a lot of humble faith. Simple gifts of bread and wine, we believe, are transformed by the faith prayer of the presider and the community, into the very Body and Blood of Jesus, the humble one. And if we receive them with humble faith and repentance, then we are transformed into the Body of Christ, sent out into the world to be leaven and light to all.

So, to experience the kingdom of God, have faith and pray for humility.

NEW YEARS HOMILY
"The Blood of Circumcision"

JOKE: "End of the World"

HH: What does blood mean to you?

PT: Live your baptism; live the Eucharist

FEAST:

- This feast was known as Feast of the Circumcision of Christ

CIRCUMCISION

- Rooted in the religious history of Israel
- God made a covenant with our ancestor Abraham that he would make him a great nation and be true to that promise forever.
- That covenant involved the sacrifice of an animal and blood
- The sign of that covenant would be circumcision
- Since then to be a Jew for a male child is to be circumcised

CIRCUMCISION TRANSFORMED

- This is like another Incarnation – a taking on of our humanity
- Jesus is a human child, born of Mary, the Mother of God
- Through his love, his death on the cross, the shedding of his blood, and the giving of his life, and his resurrection to new eternal life, Jesus transforms that ritual
- Circumcision is no longer necessary. To be a true follower of Abraham is to believe in Jesus, the Son of the God of Abraham, and surrender one's life to him.
- The sign of the new covenant is now Baptism, and the Body and Blood of Jesus, communion
- To live our baptism, and to receive communion worthily is to be spiritually circumcised, to be joined to Christ.
- Now, instead of circumcision at the age of 8 days; we are baptized into Jesus, and we receive First Communion at the age of 8 years.

EXAMPLE

Margaret in the NWT: My name, and I am baptized

Year of the Eucharist; Being a Eucharistic people workshop by + Albert

EUCCHARIST

As we celebrate today, let us be aware of the importance of what we are doing – receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus who brought about a new covenant through his death and resurrection. Let us do so with awe and reverence, striving to live as followers of Jesus.

SO: Live your baptism; live the Eucharist

HOMILY NEW YEAR'S EVE
"Like Mary, give Christ to the World"

POINT

Like Mary, we are called to give Jesus to the world

MARY

- Jesus sometimes seemed to speak disparagingly about her
- Eg: student in Beauval
- Real link: Mary, of all gospel figures, is the pre-eminent example of the one who hears the word of God and keeps it
- For this reason, he claims her as his mother
- Giving birth to Jesus is more than biological

MARY'S BIRTHING PROCESS

- Pregnancy: get pregnant by the Holy Spirit
- Gestation: gestate, nurture and protect what is growing inside
- Give birth: go through the painful process of giving birth
- Parenting: go through process of parenting (every mother gives birth twice, once biological and again in faith)
- Let go: ponder, wonder, understand, let go

MARY AS MOTHER

- Mary went through all the above
- Woman who exclaimed "you must have had a wonderful mother"
- She was mother beyond simple fact of motherhood: she heard the Word of God and kept it. That obedience, more than simple fact, gave birth to both an infant Jesus and adult Christ to the world.

IMITATION OF MARY

- Mary wants imitation, not admiration
- Our task is to give birth to Christ and Mary is our model, paradigm
- Let the word of God take root and make us pregnant
- Gestate that by giving it sustenance of our own lives
- Submit to the pain that is demanded to share our faith to the world outside
- Spend years coaxing it from infancy to adulthood
- So some pondering, accept the pain of not fully understanding and letting go

EUCCHARIST

Meal of faith, humility and love

SO: Christmas is not automatic and can't be taken for granted. It began with Mary, but each of us is asked to make our contribution to giving flesh to the world. Like Mary, let your faith, humility and love give Christ to the world.

NEW YEARS DAY
“Mary Mother of God”

HH:

Story: “If you ever want to see your mother again.”

PT:

Like Mary, share Jesus with the world through humble faith and love.

FEAST:

Mary, mother of God. Theotokos, title given to her in 5th century, means “Christ Bearer”. We also are invited to be Christ bearers, like her. How? Faith, Humility and Love.

FAITH:

Mary is known as a woman of faith. In a totally unexpected and improbable situation, her faith was strong enough to say yes to God’s plan. Her faith in her Son was absolute. She showed her faith through prayer, listening and pondering the Word of God. So must we – read, meditate, study, listen to, ponder, and contemplate the Word of God. With a faith like Mary’s, Jesus, her son, will be born and live within us, and we will be able to share him with others. (EXAMPLE: the Take Home Study of God’s Word)

HUMILITY

Mary belonged to the poor of Jesus’ day; the marginalized and the oppressed. She was at home in a stable and on a donkey, the lot of the very poor, even destitute. She welcomed animals and shepherds, the lowest of occupations, to the stable when Jesus was born. To be humble is to know who we are, our qualities as well as our defects, to be in touch with our true selves, to not wear masks or pretence. Mary was humble, and God was able to work in her as in no other. With humility like Mary’s God will also work in us and we will be able to share how God is at work in us with the world. (EXAMPLE: Barnabas gym)

LOVE

Mary was above all a woman of love. It was her love for God’s word that enabled her, along with her faith, to say “Yes” to the announcement of the angel. Her love for Joseph, and then Jesus her son, was constant and able to put up with any trial or inconvenience. Her caring was evident at the wedding feast of Cana, in her sensitivity towards the young couple’s need and her action to meet that need. At the cross, her love gave her courage to share in her son’s suffering and death with hope. With a love like Mary’s, we will be like her Son and give that love to the world.

EXAMPLE:

Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and her handling of a difficult child as recounted by Fullenbach., a woman of humble faith and love.

EUCCHARIST:

A meal that includes faith in the real presence of Jesus; humility in the ordinary gifts of bread and wine; and the love of Jesus made present for us, so that we can be transformed into the likeness of Mary and share Christ with the world.

SO:

Like Mary, share Jesus with the world through humble faith and love.

