

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD - NEW YEAR'S DAY – YEAR B

“Bless, Pray, Worship and Evangelize”

(Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

A young boy wanted a mountain bike for Christmas so desperately that he thought he would skip Santa Claus and write directly to God. He sat down and wrote, “Dear God, I want a mountain bike for Christmas and I promise I’ll be nice to my kid sister for two whole weeks.” Looking over the letter, he realized he would never be able to do that so he threw the letter away and started again, “Dear God, I want a mountain bike for Christmas and I promise that I will do the dishes without being asked for two whole weeks.” He realized he would never be able to do that either, so he threw that letter away and started again, “Dear God, I want a mountain bike for Christmas and I promise that I will get wood and water for my grandparents for one whole week.” Almost despairing with the realization that he would never be able to do that either, he suddenly got an idea; went to the living room, took down the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary that was there, wrapped it in newspaper, put it in a box and slid it under the bed. Then he sat down and wrote, “Dear God, if you ever want to see your mother again!”

According to the Calendar of Saints for January in the *Living With Christ*, of all Marian feasts of the Church, this day dedicated to Mary, Mother of God, is the greatest. Drawing on scriptural and patristic sources, it celebrates Mary’s role in the incarnation and in redemption. In this role, her special relationship with her son is emphasized and she is acknowledged as a model of the Church.

Since a new year holds such promise for new beginnings, it is appropriate that the feast have something to do with giving birth to new life. But since many of our non-Catholic cousins question this title of “Mother of God” that we Catholics give to Mary, an explanation is in order. They ask, “How could Mary be the Mother of God, how could Mary give life to God, if God has no beginning and no end?”

The answer lies in the meaning of motherhood. According to Fr. Lucien Larré, psychologist, founder of Bosco Homes and well known speaker and lecturer, no human mother actually gives life to her child.. If she did, she could prevent her child from dying of illness. No, it is God alone who gives life. Parents give “flesh and blood” to that life; they make it possible for that new life to be human life, flesh and blood. So Mary, in giving birth to Jesus, did not really give life to him. She gave “flesh and blood” to Jesus, and made it possible for him to be a human like us. It is in that sense that Mary is Mother of God.

That being said let us explore the richness of the readings provided for today’s celebration. A first striking statement is found in the second reading: *When the fullness of time had come*. This suggests a radical newness, a new creation in a sense. It suggests that all of creation, all of history was directed towards this one great moment, the Incarnation, this intervention in our human history, when God would give Jesus to us in

the flesh through Mary and the power of the Spirit. Jesus in turn would redeem us and, as our brother, make it possible for us human beings to be sons and daughters of God.

The other readings spell out how we are to live in this new creation, this redeemed world. In the first reading from Numbers, Moses and Aaron were instructed by God to bless the children of Israel. We are first of all to be a blessing to this creation, people who are able to bless one another. 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 and 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. We are all to become blessings to one another in this new creation initiated by the birth of Christ.

Secondly, we are to be a people of faith and prayer. Mary as the mother of Jesus did not understand all the sudden and surprising events that were happening to her because of her *fiat*, her *yes* to God to be the mother of Jesus, She pondered these words in her heart however. She prayed, she believed, she trusted in God’s mysterious action in her life, and so must we. Especially during this year of St Paul and following the Synod on the Word in Rome recently, we must be a people of the Word, learning to pray with scripture and to ponder the words of scripture in our hearts, if we want to be true sons and daughters of God.

Finally, like the shepherds, our most appropriate response to this quiet yet earth-shaking Good News of the birth of God’s Son into our world through Mary must be praise, worship and a willingness to spread this Good News.

It is praise and worship that lifts us out of our too narrow focus on our own needs and concerns, and opens our eye’s to the vision that God has for the world. How appropriate that we are all here today, to praise and worship our God. How appropriate that favourite Christmas carol that we sing at this time of the year, *Oh come all ye faithful, come let us adore him*.

Over and above our spirit of praise and worship, we must follow the example of the Shepherds and not keep this Good News to ourselves, but go out to share it with everyone

we meet. The shepherds *made known what had been told them about this child, and returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.* They, the poorest of the poor, were the first evangelizers. We should not be afraid to follow their example and share with others the Good News that Jesus, the Son of God, is now Son of Mary and our brother.

The following true story, in a small way, touches on the spirit of this feast, Mary, the Mother of God. Bobby was a poor boy whose father had died and whose mother was struggling to raise the five children. He wanted to buy his mother a present for Christmas but had no money. While walking along dejected he found a dime and went to a flower shop as he knew his mother liked flowers. To his surprise and delight, the store owner told him that he just happened to have a dozen roses on sale for a dime – would he want those? After Bobby left almost beside himself with happiness, the shop owner's wife asked him why he had done that. The merchant replied that he had sensed an inner voice that morning telling him to set aside a dozen roses for a special gift. When Bobby came in he was reminded of his own past when he was a poor boy with no money to buy a present, and he knew that this boy was the one who was to receive that special gift.

Mary, mother of God, gave to a poor, confused and lost world the most special of gifts, her Son Jesus. The Eucharist that we now celebrate is also a special gift that Jesus, Son of Mary, gave to us – his own flesh and blood.

May we who receive it be empowered to live lives of humble faith; prayer, worship and praise. May we also be open to share that gift with all we meet.