

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God B/2012

Today we celebrate the beginning of a New Year; a year full of promises and expectations; but also a year full of the unknown, because in our human nature, we cannot predict what will happen to us tomorrow or after tomorrow.

All the readings of this first day of the Year invite us to the understanding that God is the source of all the blessings we enjoy in this world. Even today, God continues to bless us in his Son Jesus Christ. For that reason, we have to put all the events of our life and the unknown of our future into his hands so that he may keep us under his constant care over the whole New Year we start today.

The first reading of the book of Numbers recalls how the Israelites blessed each other. In fact, according to God's recommendations given to Moses, the Israelites had to bless one another by invoking the name of Yahweh over the people. In their blessing, they prayed for safety, for God's favor, and for peace.

What is behind this text is the idea that God in his power is the creator of everything that exists and the benefactor of every grace we enjoy in this life. In that capacity, he is able to bestow his blessings upon us and according to our needs. As he has performed mighty deeds in the past for his people, he can do the same thing today by granting us a bright future.

The thing, however, is that as Christians, our future is undoubtedly associated with Jesus Christ. It is in him that God has blessed us abundantly and called us to new life in his kingdom. As St Paul says, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom us so that we might receive adoption and become God's children. In him, God has also invested us with his Spirit so that we can call him "Abba", Father, and become his heirs.

In that sense, Jesus becomes the measure of our life and of everything we can hope for from God. But, what would the life of Jesus be without Mary, his mother, who gave him birth and protected him as she cooperated with God's plan of salvation for the world.

That is the reason why the Church dedicates the beginning of every year to Mary. By doing so, the Church invites us to discover anew the particular role Mary has played in the history of salvation and in the life of Jesus. The Church wants us also to discover the role Mary can play in our own lives.

There is no doubt that Mary is the mother of Jesus as man. But, since Jesus is both God and man, Mary is given the title of "Mother of God", just as any woman deserves the title of "mother of a lawyer" or "the mother of the president of the United States", if her son is one.

We know by experience that the proper role of a mother is to care and to protect her children. Mary has done just that with Jesus like any mother would do. As disciples of Jesus, we too, at the beginning of the New Year, can put ourselves under her umbrella so that she protects us. All this fits God's plan, because it was God who made Mary the mother of Jesus and our mother.

In that perspective, we understand why the Gospel presents us with Mary and Joseph in their role of parents as they received the visit of the shepherds. First of all, the Gospel

says that, once the shepherds found the infant Jesus, they made known to others what was told them by the angels about him. Then, they returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen. Mary, for her part, kept everything in her heart as she was reflecting about all that happened. Finally, obedient to God's Law, Mary and Joseph named the Infant, Jesus, and let him be circumcised.

What do we learn about all this? The first thing we learn is that God is found in the very simple events of life. In fact, it is very striking that when the angels went to the manger, they found nothing special about infant lying there and his parents. And yet, they recognized in him the fulfillment of God's promise and returned glorifying and praising God.

This is quite different for us who want signs, miracles and proofs in order to come to believe. The shepherds teach us that God can be found in the ordinary circumstances of life. True faith does not come necessarily out of miracles and extraordinary things, but from a humble acceptance of the word that in Jesus Christ, God is present among us.

The second thing we learn is about the submission to God's will. In fact, as many things were happening around her with regard to her baby, Mary was reflecting in her heart. Reflecting in the heart is the attitude of the praying people who see in each event happening in their life as an expression of God's will. That is why they offer to the Lord in prayer their joys and their sorrows, their successes and their failures, their expectations and their hopes.

Unlike Mary, we submit with difficulty to the will of God. We are easily disappointed, frustrated and even revolted when things do not go our ways, especially when we do not understand what is happening to us.

At the beginning of this New Year, this statement is very important, because we do not know what God has in store for us. Many things will happen to us, some good, others bad. We need the faith of Mary in order to accept with courage everything of all that will happen to us.

Finally, although we live by the promise we have that God will bless us, we still do not know the circumstances and the extent to which that promise will be fulfilled. A real mystery surrounds our life and our future. God alone knows what lies before us and what can happen to us in the course of the New Year we start today.

At the example of Mary, let us put everything into God's hands and hope for God's support in time of need. May Jesus, the peace of the Father, be with you and your families! May the blessed Mother be our companion throughout the New Year we start today! Happy New Year!

Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4: 4-7; Luke 2: 16-21



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