

## **Mary, the Holy Mother of God C/2013**

The readings of this New Year describe the content of God's blessing to Israel and the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's time to save the world. They invite us to celebrate the New Year as an expression of God's blessing upon us and to put all the happenings of the year into God's hands.

The first reading of the book of Numbers recalls the recommendation God gave to Moses about the way the sons of Israel should bless each other. It shows that in order to obtain the blessing, the people invoked the name of God on them. It equally shows that in its quest for blessing, Israel prayed for safety, favor and peace.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the source of all the blessings we enjoy in this world. Another idea is the truth that God, in his grace and bounty, can take care of us and grant us whatever we ask of him in our prayer. Therefore, his blessing can extend over every need we have in our life.

This reading helps understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it talks about the visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, the blessing of God to the world. First of all, the Gospel says that in the aftermath of the birth of Jesus, the shepherds rushed to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant Jesus lying in the manger.

Then, they reported everything of what the angels told them about the child and everybody who heard it was amazed. Mary, for her part, kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. The Shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen as it what was told them. After eight days and according to the custom, Joseph and Mary gave the name of Jesus to the child and he was circumcised.

What do we learn from these readings? The first thing I want to highlight is the importance of standing on God's ground. What do I mean by that? In fact, we heard in the book of Numbers that God has promised to bless us for security, favor and peace.

And yet, one of the things we experience in life is that we do not know what can happen to us tomorrow. Of course, we hope that God will bless us, but we do not know the type of blessing we will have, the exact circumstances in which we will receive it and even its scope. The consequence of such an experience is that all our good wishes, desires and dreams are fragile, because we do not how tomorrow will be.

A real mystery plays over us and our life. God alone knows what lies before us and what can happen to us in the course of the New Year we start today. In that perspective, if we just say that "I am going to stand on my ground", that is so imprudent. It would be better to stand on God's ground than on our own.

Why? Because we know that with God, at least, we stand on solid and strong ground. If our own personal ground comes to scramble, we can count on him, because he can provide us with shelter and comfort.

This point is very important at the beginning of this New Year. That is why on the list of our wishes for this year, we need to leave a window open to the unknown, just in case things do not turn out to be as we thought they should be. There is wisdom in doing so,

for “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep vigil” (Psalm 127: 1-2).

The second thing I want to highlight is the importance of having a mother. I draw this point from the fact that the beginning of every New Year is consecrated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. But, why is the Church doing so? There should be a reason for it.

In fact, we all know the role a mother can play in the life of someone. What would our life be without these great women who took care of us and opened us to the reality of the world! Our relationships with our mothers might have changed over the years, but without them we would not have been who we are today.

Someone might not have known his or her dad, but the psychological effect is not the same with not having a Mum. Experience has shown that mothers are so special that orphans of mothers miss a lot of tenderness and gentleness that come from them.

A mother by virtue is someone who cares and protects her children. Mary has done just that with Jesus like any mother would do. By consecrating the New Year to Mary, the Church invites us to re-discover the role of Mary in God’s plan and in the life of Jesus. The Church wants us also to re-discover the role Mary can play in our own lives. It equally wants that us to take Mary as our second mother.

There is no doubt that Mary is the mother of Jesus as man. But, since Jesus is both God and man, Mary deserves 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.

As disciples of Jesus, we 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. 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 sons and daughters.

The portrait of Mary we have in today’s Gospel is full of praise. Luke says that once she heard all that the shepherds said about her son, she kept all that in her heart, reflecting upon it. In that perspective, Mary is an example of praying people who take advantage of any event happening in their life in order to see in it the will of God. Such people offer easily in prayer the important moments of their life to God, whether they are joyful or sorrowful.

As we start a New Year, without knowing how it will be, let us follow in the footsteps of Mary, our mother. Let us ask her to protect us, as she did Jesus. May her son, Jesus, be with us and bless us, as we enter the New Year! May God bless you all!

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



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