

Mary, the Holy Mother of God C/2016

The readings of this New Year describe the promise of God's blessing to Israel and present 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 associate those blessings with Mary from whom has come to us Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

The first reading recalls the recommendations of God to Moses about the way of blessing the sons of Israel. It also shows the reasons why the Israelites prayed for God's blessings, namely for safety, favor and peace.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the source of all the blessings people enjoy in their life. Another idea is the truth that God, in his grace and bounty, is able to take care of the needs of people and grant whatever they ask of him in their prayers.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in 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 reports what the shepherds did after having received the message of the angels, how they went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant Jesus lying in the manger.

It also reports about their communication with regard to the message received from the angels and the reaction of the people who heard about it. Then, the Gospel talks about the reaction of Mary who kept everything in her heart. The Gospel ends with the return of the shepherds who were glorifying God, the circumcision of the baby Jesus and the giving of the name.

What do we learn from these readings? Today I want to talk about God's blessings upon us and in our lives. My starting point is the words from the first reading: Tell the sons of Israel that "they shall invoke my name upon (them), and I will bless them" Numbers 6:27.

Those words are an expression of God's will to bless us. I say "us", because though it is Israel that is specifically cited in the text, we should not forget that God chose them in order to show us how he deals with human beings. In fact, the choice of Israel has a character of exemplarity in the sense that God wanted that we may see through them how he wants to deal with us.

We have the confirmation of this vision in the blessing of Abraham after he accepted to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. At that time, God told him: "I will bless you abundantly ... and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing – all this because you obeyed my command" Genesis 22: 17a.-18.

The will of God to bless us is eternal and perpetual in human history; it is related to all the epochs, all the spaces, all the times and all the generations. As it was in the past, so it is today. When in our life and our undertakings and in various ways, we feel blessed, it is part of the fulfillment of God's promise and will upon us.

Though it is God's intention to bless us, we are, however, surrounded by a deep mystery, because 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 to draw from such a vision is that we have to understand that all our good wishes, our desires and our dreams are fragile, because we do not know how tomorrow will be.

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 according to the Psalm 127, ““Unless the Lord builds 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).

Because our dreams and desires are fragile, we want to invoke the support, the protection and the accompaniment of Mary throughout this year. She is the mother of Jesus, our savior; she is also our mother. In fact, we all know the role a mother plays 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 that of 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 also that we re-discover the role Mary can play in our own lives.

As disciples of Jesus, we 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.

Let us prepare to do exactly that as we start a New Year, full of the unknown about our future and our life. Let us walk in the footsteps of Mary, our mother, so that anything that will happen to us, we may meditate it in our hearts, with the desire to discover in it the will of God. Let us ask Mary to protect us, as she did Jesus. May her son, Jesus, be with us and bless us, as we enter the New Year! Happy New Year to everyone!

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



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