

New Year's Day: Mary, Mother of God

Holy Rosary Cathedral

1 January 2012

Dear brother priests, Deacon Pablo, dear parishioners and friends in Christ:

Introduction

The year 2011 is now history, but the Church remains ever alive in the spiritual atmosphere of Christmas, in which we continue to ponder the mystery of Christ's birth. Today, as you have heard, we are celebrating the Virgin Mary, whom the Church venerates as the Mother of God. In her humility she prompts us to raise a hymn of thanksgiving for the many graces given us this past year and to look forward with hope to the new year now upon us. Above all, she prompts us to be thankful in our lives for the living and personal Gift of the Father which is his beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, "the child lying in the manger" (Lk 2:16) found by the shepherds in the stable of Bethlehem.¹

Gift of Time

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul tells us that with the birth of Christ, "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4), the fullness of time had come. God, in his mercy, had given the world his only Son, whom the Angels proclaimed to the shepherds as "Saviour" and "Christ, the Lord" (Lk 2:11).

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers (31 December 2010).

When God sent his only Son to take on a human nature like our own, he set the world on a new course. He gave us all a new beginning, which we remind ourselves of year after year in the liturgy and even in our civil calendar which marks our time on earth.

Aware as we are of the fleetingness of time on earth – not everything is the same as it was this time last year – we must ask ourselves the question whether we are living the limited time allotted to us as a “time of salvation and grace”? Do I see the events of my life be they important or trivial, simple or complicated, joyful or sad, not as a simple accumulation of things happening to me, but as signs of grace and salvation? Do I read the events of my life in light of the goal that lies beyond time itself – and into the eternity of God for which I am destined?² Or do I live as if the Lord were not with me, as if things “just happen” rather than being part of a plan, a design which he has for my life?

In the Gospel we heard that all who heard what the shepherds told about what the Angel had said about the newborn Infant in Bethlehem were “amazed” (Lk 2:18). They knew, probably even without being able to put it into words, that God had done something wonderful for them.

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers (31 December 2009).

St. Paul, writing many years later, captured in his letter to the Galatians just what this effect was. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, was to enable each of us – and all of us – to have a close and intimate relationship with God. No longer was he just the great and awesome God who made the universe and gave the Law on Mount Sinai. The Apostle tells us that because the Son of God became man, God is close to us. We are his sons and daughters. We who have received into our hearts the Spirit of his Son can call upon him not just with the words “Almighty” and “Lord” but “Abba, Father” – dearest Father (cf. Gal 4:6).

If we ask: Why did God become man? we receive the answer. The Word made flesh to save us, to change us, to transform our life from inside. How does he do that? He shares with us his divine sonship. He became like us in order for us to become like him: children of the Father, people freed from the power of sin and death.³

That is the wonder of our Christmas celebrations which the Church prolongs for yet another week. God became man, so “that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are” (1 Jn 3:1). This, dear friends, is reason for rejoicing at the beginning of this new year, *his* new year for us.

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers (31 December 2007).

Mary, Mother of God

Now just a brief word about Mary, to whom the Church directs our attention at the beginning of this new year.

In the Second Reading, the Apostle Paul very discreetly points to the one through whom the Son of God entered the world: “God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). That woman was Mary of Nazareth. In her, God’s face took on a human face, letting itself be seen and recognized. She was the first to see the face of God made man and live. Like every other mother, Mary had a very special and, in a certain way, exclusive relationship with her newborn Son.⁴

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (1 January 2010).

In this morning's Gospel the St. Luke remarks how Our Lady received and tried to assimilate the extraordinary events in which God had quite unexpectedly involved her. She did not fret or worry. Rather, as he writes, "Mary treasured all these words, and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2: 19). Before the mystery of God's unfathomable love, she was silent. Her attitude is one of restful contemplation. Having just given birth to her Son in a makeshift stall and been visited by adoring shepherds, Mary responds by treasuring "in her heart the words that come from God and, piecing them together as in a mosaic, learns to understand them."⁵

What a lesson for us, an invitation to enter into silence. I am not much for recommending to others new year's "resolutions" but today's Gospel so strongly suggests that, like Mary, we carve out a small space of silence in our daily lives: a little time every day when we can simply be alone with God and not busying ourselves even with words.

In that silence, we, like Mary, can "ponder" what wonders the Lord is working in our lives even amidst its trials and difficulties. We need silence to help us discern his actions. Even Mary did. She didn't need to understand all that was occurring, nor to know all that lied ahead, but over and over again she, like us, needed time to abandon herself in trust to

⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily (1 January 2006).

the One who always bestows blessing and graciousness.⁶ Throughout our lives we need the time and space to meditate prayerfully on how the Lord is working in our lives as our “Abba, Father.”

Conclusion

Christ’s birth is entirely suffused with the light of Mary and today we turn in gratitude to her, for her “yes” made possible his Birth and the gift of Redemption.

⁶ Cf. Barbara E. Reid, *Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections for Year B* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2011), 16-17.

This first day of the year is placed under Mary's protection, as is the whole Church in Vancouver. At her school, let us learn to become attentive and sometimes silent disciples of her Son. With her motherly help, let us begin this new year of grace and salvation with hope and trust in the mercy of God, asking Mary to accompany us on our journey of faith and to support and guide as we make our way to the Father's house.

_ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver