

New Year's Day: Mary, Mother of God

Holy Rosary Cathedral

1 January 2019

Dear brother priests, deacons, parishioners and visitors to Holy Rosary Cathedral:

Introduction

At the dawn of this new year of grace, the year of Our Lord 2019, let us give God thanks for the many blessings we have received during the past year, blessings no doubt often mixed with trials and tragedies, but blessings nonetheless.

The blessing of Aaron which we heard proclaimed in the First Reading has been fulfilled in us and for us: God has been gracious to us, and his face has shone upon us (cf. Num 6:25). That's why it is right and just that we give him thanks and praise for the merciful love that he has lavished upon us. For his mercy, then, we give thanks, but also for the fact that, through no merit of our own, we have received from him the gift of faith. And what a gift our faith is! It opens us to understand that time, the passing of the years, is taking us somewhere. In our lives time is a gift God uses to unfold his graciousness to us, leading to fulfilment in his Kingdom.

Today, the eighth day or octave of Christmas, the Church calls us to turn our gaze to Mary, whose motherhood we are celebrating. This is the maternity we praise every time we pray the "Hail Mary" saying "holy Mary, Mother of God." Thanks to the willingness expressed in her

fiat (cf. Lk 1:38), the Son of God was “born of woman” (Gal 4:4). As St. Paul wrote, Jesus came into the world as a real man, to save us from sin and eternal death, and make us sons and daughters of God. Thanks to his Birth, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can now address the Creator with the tender name of “Father” (cf. Gal 4:5).

Happy New Year!

Happy New Year! How many times have you heard that in the past few days? How many times did you greet others in the same way? Did you understand it just as a conventional greeting not meaning very much and, when you said it, was it really your wish that the person greeted find happiness in the New Year?

What, then, is the happiness we wish for others, and for ourselves as this new year begins?

It would be a mistake, of course, to expect *perfect* happiness this year or, for that matter, any year in this life. The insatiable drive we all have for perfect happiness can only be fully satisfied in eternal life with God. Nonetheless, we can experience a foretaste of true joy even now – and that’s what we wish for in our New Year’s greeting. On earth we really can have a taste of the greater happiness we hope for in the world to come. This happiness, this peace, is Jesus’ Christmas gift to us.

Happiness Is Not Pleasure or Possessions

God does want us to be happy in this life. But many people make

the mistake of identifying happiness with pleasure. Happiness and pleasure, however, are not the same thing. In fact, pleasure can be the cause of a great deal of unhappiness. How much unhappiness has been caused by the temporary pleasure found in alcohol, drugs, or sex outside of marriage? Few things have caused as much unhappiness to as many people as these so-called pleasures. Not only are they fleeting, they are harmful to oneself, to others and to one's soul.

It would also be a mistake to think that happiness consists in amassing possessions. If having many things could make people happy, Canadians would be just about the happiest people in the world. We have more possessions than any previous generation in human history. But we are not the happiest. Perhaps it is because we let things possess us. What happens all too often in our affluent society is that we love things more than other people to get the things we desire.

To be honest, it's easy to be content with the superficial pleasures that daily life offers us. Sooner or later, however, we come realize that these pleasures do not make us truly happy, because true happiness comes from a much deeper source. The happiness we are seeking, the happiness we were created to enjoy, has another origin: it is Jesus of Nazareth, "who wants nothing more than for you to be truly happy."¹

¹ Benedict XVI, Message for the First National Day of Young Catholics in the

Happiness Found in Bethlehem

Let's look at today's Gospel to see what it can tell us about happiness. Let's go with the shepherds to Bethlehem to see that "good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10).

Look into the manger – and I suggest you do this as the new year begins, even if it is just by looking at a Christmas card with a Nativity scene.

See the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and then look around. None of the things in which we so often seek happiness are evident. There are no signs of pleasure or possessions. Nothing but an empty cave on the outskirts of a small town in the hills of an outpost of the Roman Empire.

Now look at Mary and Joseph kneeling before the Child lying in the manger (cf. Lk 2:16). They must be exhausted. They have travelled more than 150 kilometres from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Joseph on foot and Mary on the jolting back of a donkey. They must be cold in this damp cave in the middle of winter. Think, too, how humiliating it must have been, especially for Joseph, to discover no room among his relatives in his ancestral home or at the village inn.

Yet, in the midst of all of this, Mary and Joseph are the happiest

Netherlands (21 November 2005).

people on the face of the earth. Why? Because the world has received its “Saviour, who is the Christ, the Lord” (Lk 2:11). Here in Bethlehem they are teaching us that it is Jesus who is the cause of our happiness – a joy that no one can take from us.²

Happiness comes from God’s closeness to us, from his presence in our life, from his love for us, which enables us to love him and others in return.

When you say to yourself “I want to be happy,” go to the manger scene of the Holy Family to learn over and over again that happiness has its root in knowing and experiencing God’s love for you.

Jesus entered into history with his birth in Bethlehem, to bring “joy to the world,” just as in the carol we sing. It is not just a joy postponed until heaven, “but a joy already real and tangible now, because Jesus himself is our joy.”³

Conclusion

Today, on Mary’s feast, let us ask her, the Mother of God, to help us understand that the happiness we wish for in this new year will come from knowing and loving Jesus Christ, to whom she gave birth in “the

² Cf. Rodney Kissinger, Homily for Mary, Mother of God: http://www.frksj.org/homily_newyear.htm.

³ Francis, Angelus (14 December 2014).

fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) and who now comes to us in the redeeming sacrifice of this Eucharist.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver