

New Year: Mary, Mother of God A/2011

I often hear people say to their friends and the members of their families when they have important matters to handle: “Good luck”; “all the best”; “my prayer is with you”, or “you have all our support”, etc. These words are an expression of a deep desire and profound wish that she/he may succeed and be happy.

However, the fulfillment of these wishes depends on the performance someone can display, or his/her abilities to handle the matter he/she is dealing with. The awareness that the success of any enterprise depends on the abilities or the skills of those involved pushes us on a spiritual level to turn to God who is the ultimate recourse for those who believe in him.

If God does not bless us, in fact, our enterprises, as beautiful as they might be, are doomed to fail. According to the words of the prophet Isaiah, indeed, it is God who metes out peace to us, for it is he who has accomplished all we have done (Is 26, 12). It is that logic that presides at the celebration of the liturgy of the New Year. In fact, on the New Year, the Church invites us to understand that God is the ground of all the blessings we can have in this world. Therefore, we have to put all the events of our life and the unknown of our future into his hands so that he may guide us and keep us under his constant care over the whole New Year.

We are not the only ones to think that way. In the past, the people of Israel also acted in the same way. They knew that God was the source of all the things they enjoyed in the world. That is why they blessed the people by invoking the name of God on them so that they may have security, favor and peace.

The same God who did that for Israel continues to bestow his blessings and graces upon us today through his son Jesus who he put as mediator between heaven and earth. However, we cannot dissociate Jesus from Mary, his mother, who gave him birth and protected him as she cooperated with God’s plan of salvation for the world.

That is one of the reasons 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 salvation history 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 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.

A mother by virtue is someone who cares and protects 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. 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.

In Jesus, then, God has adopted us and made us his children so that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can call him “Abba”, which means Father. Moreover, by receiving Jesus Christ in our hearts, we receive the message of salvation.

It is that salvation which the shepherds have received by recognizing Jesus as the savior. They came to the truth of Jesus by following the instructions of the angels. There was nothing apparently noticeable and attractive about a manger, a baby and his parents beside him. By finding the baby lying in a manger, they were happy to witness to the fulfillment of God's promises as they were told.

The simplicity of the faith of the shepherds challenges us who always want proof, signs and miracles to sustain our faith. The shepherds teach us that God can be found in the ordinary circumstances of life. For that reason, it is clear that true faith does not come out of miracles and extraordinary things, but from a humble acceptance of the word of God that in Jesus Christ, God is present among us.

Quite interesting, also, is the attitude of Mary who kept all the things happening about Jesus, reflecting them in her heart. At this title, Mary is an example of praying people who speak more interiorly with God than they make noise around them. Such people take advantage of the events happening in their lives, whether they are joyful or sorrowful, in order to be in continual touch with God.

Another thing Mary teaches us is her vision of the will of God. From the annunciation by the angel to the birth of Jesus in very difficult circumstances, Mary submitted herself to the will of God. This is quite the opposite of us who are easily frustrated, disappointed, and affected by the wind of events.

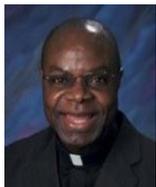
This point is crucial because, as we enter the New Year, we certainly do not know how it will be. Many things will happen to us, some good, others bad. Can we have the courage of Mary to accept them in faith and to read them in the light of the word of Jesus?

Of course, we are the bearers of God's promise of blessing upon us, as we heard in the first reading. The truth, however, is that we do not know how it will be fulfilled and to what extent, and in what circumstances. There is a real mystery surrounding 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.

Let me finish by saying that to be a person of faith, like Mary, is to put everything into God's hands, to be ready for whatever can happen to us, to take seriously our commitment in society, and hope for God's support in time of need.

Peace be to you and your families. Peace be to our world today and forever. 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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