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Mary, the Holy Mother of God - 1 January 2022

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1 January 2022

Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

The calendar year begins with the solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. As we look forward to the year ahead, this celebration reminds us that God's grace is offered every day and every day we can make an authentic response to it. Following Mary, our response allows God to become manifest in our world. This day is also declared World Day of Peace by the Holy See.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came and we are redeemed.
Lord, have mercy.

You came so that we are can become your heirs.
Christ, have mercy.

You came to fill us with your joy and peace.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

*O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary
bestowed on the human race
the grace of eternal salvation,
grant, we pray,
that we may experience the intercession of her,
through whom we were found worthy
to receive the author of life,
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.*

Our prayer highlights the role of Mary in the divine plan of salvation, and in this continues the liturgical sense of the Christmas season and the theology of the incarnation it embodies. As well, the collect brings out the way in which God's plans do not reflect human wisdom. After all, it is the virgin who is fruitful, and later in the petition we hear that the humble bearer of a life is carrying the author of all life. God has truly entered human history and become vulnerable to the conditions of human

and material life. As the new year begins the faithful petition that they may feel under Mary's intercession, a sentiment that resonates with the care of this mother for her newborn infant. And so, the year is commenced in prayer with the mystery of redemption, the unfathomable ways of God, the agency of the young woman, and a sense of the ongoing care of the mother.

First Reading

Numbers 6:22–27

This ancient prayer that was once recited daily over the people of God, reminds us that God's perennial purpose is to bless all.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 66(67):2–3, 5–6, 8

May God bless us in his mercy.

This psalm echoes the blessing of Moses in the first reading. With God giving blessings it is necessary for us to respond with praise and this beautiful psalm encapsulates such praise.

Second Reading

Galatians 4:4–7

Through the Holy Spirit, we are called to be sons and daughters of God. This is made possible with the sending of God's Son, born of a woman.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:16–21

The shepherds visit the child Jesus and recall their experience of the angel's proclamations. Mary's response gives us another dimension of faith in practice, she reflects and contemplates these events in her heart.

Reflection

Obviously, this feast day honours Mary and is appropriately part of the Christmas Octave given her part in the Christmas story. This solemnity is one of several special days that feature Mary in the liturgical calendar. But what is it about this day that is special? At the risk of sounding discourteous, why another day and why this day?

We can start by looking at the wording of our feast today; Mary, Holy Mother of God. It is something that can slide out without thought. But think about it; Mary, a woman,

is a mother of God? How can that be? How does God have a mother and still somehow remain God? This is the sort of question that vexed many, especially in earlier days of Christian history. There was a name for a particular group that had issue with it that emerged in the 5th century called Nestorians. More extreme proponents of Nestorianism thought it was illogical and belittling to God to suggest that God could be 'born' at all and, likewise, suspicious of elevating Mary, a human being as any other, to such a high station. The theological concerns and responses are quite sophisticated and well beyond a simple reflection like this one, but we do know that the confrontation within the Christian tradition caused the Church to look carefully at what it meant by such phrasing and how it serves us to hang on to it.

The first thing to consider is that such a title is not primarily trying to say something about Mary in herself, but something about God and how God comes to be present in the person of Jesus Christ. It is an expression of God's nature which is to bless. The beautiful prayer that forms the First Reading known as the 'Aaronic blessing' speaks of this reality. The text from Numbers, in its poetic form, is believed to be among the oldest pieces of poetry in Sacred Scripture. It is a foundational revelation of God's nature and of what God would bring to us; blessing, peace, graciousness. Though repeated as a prayer that we may well recite for and with each other, it is, in fact, God's own blessing for God's people. It is an expression of God's very heart.

It is this very heart which is manifest in the person of Jesus. The understanding that Mary is 'the Mother of God' was important to the early church and is still held by Catholics to this day because it is a statement of how and what God blesses. Those who sought to dismiss such an understanding such as the Nestorians did not doubt that God is good and that God blesses; however, they did have trouble that God blesses through our humanity. They understood that Mary was only the mother of the humanity of Jesus, not the totality. They effectively sought to divide the divine Jesus from the human Jesus. The counter forms the kernel of the solemnity celebrated today; Mary is the mother of Jesus that is both fully human *and* fully God.

God is not a part-time God. When God wants to be 'with us', God does not do it in some half-baked approach – Mary as 'the mother of God' is a statement that God is all-in with us. A saviour came into the world in Jesus; fully God and fully human to redeem the all of humanity to be with the all of God.

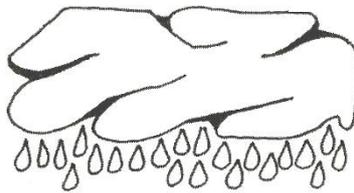
Further, God's presence to us in the person of Jesus expresses God's intention to bless humanity in a particular way. Jesus is born of a woman like any other human. Jesus had, indeed, needed a mother. To be human is to be born, with all that goes along with it. A newborn is entirely dependent, requiring nourishment, protection, shelter and comfort, none of which it can provide for itself. As we grow, we still need our human family and wider communities to inform and teach us what matters and how to belong. God is present in this because God essentially has deemed this the right and proper way for humans to actually be human.

Thus, when we look on the Second Reading, we see that our blessing comes by being called children of God, that is, into a family of God. Jesus models for us the importance of being with each other in true relationship; with all the vulnerability and

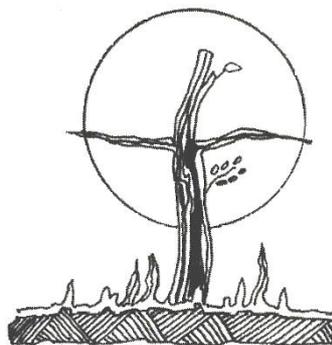
strength that comes with that. Further, it reminds us that God continues to desire to bless our world through humanity; through you and through me.

Mary, Mother of God is not only a statement of the status of Mary herself, or even of Jesus (though it is that of course). Mary also provides us the model for all our lives; that is to manifest the blessing and presence of God in our world. We may not feel we're up to it, we may not feel we're good enough, we may not feel we're worthy enough. We may even have good reason to think this. Like the Nestorians, we may think that a perfect God cannot possibly be entirely entwined with an imperfect humanity. Nevertheless, God's presence through Mary's child Jesus is a statement by God's very being that we are quite good enough for God.

As we open our calendar year, we hold onto this recognition that God still desires to bless and, further, that we are interwoven in the process of this blessing nature of God. We need God's blessing every day, and every day we are invited to be God's blessing to each other. God does not wait for our perfect selves to manifest before offering blessing. Rather, God blesses through our imperfect selves. As we bring Jesus' presence to life through healing, forgiveness, goodness and humble dealing with each other, we continue the calling modelled by Mary, Mother of God and the truth that is captured in this understanding.



Let the clouds
rain down the
Just One and
the earth bring
forth a Saviour.



Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Like Mary our mother who always put her hope in God, we now present our needs to God with humble confidence.

Petitions

We pray for Francis our Pope, our Bishops, the clergy and members of the Plenary Council. With Mary, as Mother of our Church, may they find inspiration in her discipleship and willingness to be guided by the Spirit.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit to govern with integrity and fairness and to support all those who are on the front line fighting the pandemic. On this World Day of Peace, we pray that their efforts will be just and right.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all parents, that following the example of Mary and Joseph, they may lovingly raise their children to know and love God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for couples experiencing infertility or the loss of a child, that God will give them comfort, strength and hope in their time of grief.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the needs of the community gathered here today, that strengthened by God's grace and the intercession of Mary, we will continually conform our lives to God's will and work towards peace in every aspect of our lives.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those suffering ill health in mind, body and spirit, particularly those suffering from the pandemic. May they be restored through the care of those who love them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

We offer these needs to our loving God with complete confidence that they will be answered. We make these prayers through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator, come. R. Maurus, et al./ Thomas Tallis. 376
Hark! the herald angels sing. F. Mendelssohn. 704
Magnificat (Tell out my soul). T. Dudley Smith/ W. Greatorex. 550
May God bless and keep you. C. Walker. 441
My soul rejoices. O. Alstott. 250
There is nothing told. C. Willcock SJ. 548

AOV1

Hark! the herald angels sing. F. Mendelssohn. 704
May God bless and keep you. C. Walker. 177
O holy Mary. O. Alstott. 141
What child is this? W. Dix. 165 (Verses 1 and 2)

AOVNG

Among all. Chris de Silva. 8

CWB

Hail Queen of Heaven, the ocean star. John Lingard. 702
Holy Virgin, by God's decree. Jean-Paul Lécot, tr. W. R. Lawrence. 714
Immaculate Mary, we praise God in you. Brian Foley. 723
O Mary of Graces and Mother of God. Tr. Douglas Hyde. 769
Salve, Regina. Hermanus Contractus. 801
Sing of Mary, pure and lowly. Roland Ford Palmer SSJE. 808

CWBII

Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae. Hermanus Contractus. 406
Hail, Queen of heav'n, the ocean star. John Lingard. 408
Hail, holy Queen enthroned above. Hermanus Contractus *et al.* 409
Holy Virgin, by God's decree. Jean-Paul Lécot, tr. W. R. Lawrence. 410
Mary, Mother of Good Counsel. Murray J. Kroetsch. 411
Servant of the Word. Edward M. Grosz. 414
Immaculate Mary, we praise God in you. Brian Foley. 416
There is nothing told. Didier Rimaud SJ, tr. Christopher Willcock SJ. 418

S&S2

Hail Mary: gentle woman. Carey Landry. 336

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 66: *May God bless us in his mercy.*
Psalm 66: Robert J. Batastini/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 195
May God bless us in his mercy. LPSF Tony Alonso. pg.18

Music selections by Michael Mangan

There is a child (TT/SYJ) *based on Is 9:1-7* [Gathering]
Song of Blessing (SHOF) *based on Numbers 6:22-27* [Gifts]
Glory to God (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]
My Spirit Sings (FWS/SYJ/CWB II) *Magnificat* [Gathering, Recessional]