**Mary Holy Mother of God**

Today is the octave of Christmas and the Solemnity feast of Mary as the Holy Mother of God. It was in the third or fourth century that the title “Mother of God” was bestowed on Mary. But the Greek term ***Theotokos*** (“The God-bearer”) was officially consecrated as Catholic doctrine at the Council of Ephesus in 431, thus becoming the first Marian dogma. However, this same day, is a trifecta celebration day, because we also celebrate, World Day of Peace.

Formal definition of Mary as Theotokos came about because of a heresy by ***Nestorius*** who claimed that Jesus was not God, but merely the God-bearer. Which means that there is a separation between the divinity and the humanity of Christ or that there are two Persons and not as the Church defined both as in two natures in one Person. He claimed that Mary was the mother of a man and not of God. The Council of Ephesus condemned the heresy of ***Nestorianism*** and affirmed what was always believed by Christians: that Jesus is not the God-bearer, but that Jesus is GOD. Mary is the God-bearer (Theotokos), not the mother of a man, but the Mother of God.

This Catholic doctrine is based on the doctrine of Incarnation, as expressed by St. Paul: **“God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law”** (Galatians 4:4). God did not just send a man, He sent His Son who is God. The solemnity of the Mother of God, which now coincides with the octave-day of Christmas and the beginning of the New Year, this year, was probably assigned this day because of the influence of the Byzantine Church, which celebrates solemnity of the most holy Theotokos on December 26. This is in accordance with the Eastern practice of honoring secondary persons on the day after the feast of the principal personage (in this case, the birth of Christ).

Even before Pope ***Sergius*** introduced four Marian feasts in the seventh century (the Birth of Mary, the Annunciation, the Purification and the Assumption), the octave day of Christmas was celebrated in Rome in honor of the Motherhood of Mary. Later, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the feast of the Circumcision was added, although it had been introduced in Spain and France at the end of the sixth century and was later included in the Missal of Pope St. Pius V. The recent liturgical reform has restored the original Roman practice, which replaced the pagan feast of the New Year, dedicated to the god Janus, with this feast honoring the Mother of God.

In the eighteenth century in Portugal, a popular feast began in honor of Mary's motherhood, and in 1914 the date of the feast was fixed at October 11. It was extended to the entire Latin Church in 1931, the fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus. The restoration of the feast to January 1, which falls in the Christmas season and has an ecumenical significance, coincides with other anniversaries; for example, the octave day of Christmas, the circumcision of the Infant Jesus (assigned to the first Sunday of January); the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus (which dates back to 1721); and the day for peace, introduced by Pope Paul VI.

Our readings today reflects on the blessings that our Lord bestow on us. As we remember the ancient blessing God gave the Israelites, may we be reminded of the Incarnation the solemnity we are celebrating from last Sunday. For through the Incarnation of the Son of God through Mary His Mother, God looked kindly upon us and gave us peace that only He could give us. As we enter into a new year today, we should remember all the blessings we received from God in 2022. In our first reading, we are called to remember that all blessings come from God when God told Moses to teach His priests how to bless His people. This blessings should remind us of the prayer our Lord taught us through His apostles, the “Our Father.”

In our second reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians, Paul reminded them of the coming of the Prince of Peace at the fullness of time through Mary. We should be amazed that God has placed us in the fullness of time, the age of Christ. A time that God had set apart for His coming in our midst. He came to bless us with His grace so that we could be saved. God sent His Son into the world in human flesh that He received through His Mother Mary. Unlike the first Adam, Jesus did not sin. He came to free us from sin and death. He came to bring peace to the world and remove the shackles the evil one had entrapped humanity into at the fall of our first parents.

At the fullness of time, Jesus came into this world because He wants to be our friend. He invites us to come to Him to find refreshment from the trials and troubles we encounter in this life. We should never reject His invitation on the grounds that He does not know or understands our human situation. In the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus became human like us in every way but sin. Have you lost a loved one, Jesus had to bury His foster father Joseph. He wept before the tomb of His friend Lazarus. Are you frustrated by bills and financial losses? Jesus assumed the obligation of caring for twelve apostles even though He had no place to lay His head. In His passion, He was betrayed by Judas, and denied by Peter one of His closest apostles.

In our Gospel reading, we are reminded of what happened at the birth of our Lord. The scene set up for us by Luke reflects the joy when children are born, portraying the humanity of Jesus. However, the infant Babe laid in a manger surrounded by His Mother and appointed step-father Joseph, with shepherds and animals admiring and in awe of the little Baby the King of the universe. Luke told us the shepherds told those who were there about the message angels told them about the Child. Luke told us that His mother Mary took all the news into her heart and pondered on them.

Then, we are told that the shepherds left rejoicing, glorifying, and praising God because the chief Shepherd of the universe had been born. They were the first eye witness of the birth of Jesus. Jesus chose to let the lowly and humble of heart see Him first, and not the learned and the authorities. Then Luke brought us back to the realization that Jesus’ birth was not just an ordinary birth, but human and divine; by reminding us about the eight day after His birth, that He was circumcised in His humanity and in His divinity that His name Jesus was given by God through angel Gabriel.

The lesson we should learn from the narration of the birth of Jesus is that, we too should be amazed that God has placed us in this age of fullness, the age of Christ, and He has put us in the position to respond to His gift of faith. How grateful should we be, for we are truly blessed than any prophets and kings of old who would have loved to see this day!

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Him for more grace so we can fully comprehend how blessed we are to live in this era.