

# CATHOLIC DISTANCE UNIVERSITY

## Homily Thoughts for the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

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Sunday, January 1, 2012

Numbers 6:22-27

Psalm 67: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8

Galatians 4:5-7

Luke 2:16-21

Blessed New Year! I hope that this year for you is one of more closely following the Lord. Now you can thank Pope Paul VI for restoring this feast to this day. In his encyclical 1974, he said: "This celebration, assigned to January 1 in conformity with the ancient liturgy of the city of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the 'holy Mother . . . through whom we were found worthy . . . to receive the Author of life.' It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewed adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels, and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace. For this reason . . . we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an observance that is gaining increasing support and is already bringing forth fruits of peace in the hearts of many." (no. 5). So the meaning of this day is vast.

In the *First Reading*, we hear from the ancient *Book of Numbers*. We hear of the glorious time in the history of the People of God. God is instructing the priestly leaders his people in the words that should be used for blessing. So for example, "The LORD bless you and keep you!" This phrase recognizes that the blessings of life come from the Lord God. This is a good lesson for the beginning of the year! The reading concludes with the words: "So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them." The expectation is the Israelites first of all *will* invoke the name of God. This is an act of worship, an act of respect. The people are bonded to God. They need to acknowledge that.

This same theme of the minute by minute worship of God continues in the *Psalm* that we sing, which is why we should sing it. By singing it we adopt the sentiments of the *Psalm*. As God's community we sing that: "May God bless us in his mercy." The community knows that it is living on God's stage, under God's hand. But not only the community, all of the nations: "May the nations be glad and exult." The final lines of the psalm say it all: "May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him!" He is the source of all blessings and so we should worship him in return (this is the meaning of 'fear' here!).

But what are these blessings? The two greatest blessings are shown to us in the *Second Reading*. Paul told the Church community in Galatia two things: God sent his Son, and God sent his Spirit. The Divine Son came

as a man to meet us the way that we meet other men and women. The Divine Spirit came into our hearts as the doctor of our spirits AND to help us grasp what the Divine Son is doing in our world in his Church, which after all, is his body in this world. This is the way, the only way, that we will understand and accept what God is doing.

These points are important for appreciating the *Gospel*. We don't hear much about Mary—on her feast day—except for one thing. But let me leave that aside for a moment. Instead we hear about the shepherds. These are people like you and me. They hear about Jesus. They go to see him (the Divine Son) and they grasp interiorly who he is (through the Divine Spirit). The *Gospel* says: “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.” This is what should happen in the lives of people who are looking. Let's face it everyone is looking for the real meaning of life! People looking at the Church should see Christ and grasp who he really is. Then they will praise God. Of course that puts a great responsibility on us who are members of the Church.

Now the other strand in the Gospel lies in the few words about Mary. Saint Luke says: “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” Right from the Annunciation, she had been seeing wondrous things. As a Jew she had learned of the wonders of God's working in the history of her people. Because she was sinless, she could just join in the history of salvation. She does not have the resistance that we have. Mary could delight in what God was doing she did not need something else. Another lesson for the New Year! She could relish what God was doing. She was immersed in the civilization that God was bringing to the world. Then too there is another angle. She not only has the historical events in her heart but these events prepared her to become the womb for the Incarnation. She became the Mother of God. So her worshipful embrace of the unfolding of salvation becomes concrete in her motherhood. She gives her own body to be part of the history of salvation. Another good lesson for the New Year! Catholicism can be very inconvenient. But if we believe then we need to live it out. Happy New Year!