

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jan 1st 2018

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Born of a woman, born under the law....

Eight days ago, we celebrated the great feast of the Incarnation, God with us! Born of a woman, whose name is Mary, from a little town called Nazareth. We hear she pondered all these things in her heart. What was she thinking and holding in her heart? What questions did she have? After all, she was only human giving birth to God! She was a Jewish woman faithful to the Mosaic Law, her God, would raise her son accordingly and at great risk.

While pondering all this in my heart, I would recall my own mother. She was not Catholic, although baptized Christian. When she married my dad, she had to sign a paper promising to raise her children Catholic. She was faithful to that commitment and never hesitated to let us know when she got us up early to attend the children's Mass on Sundays, or just sending us off to Catholic schools as well as seeing that our sacramental lives were lived. She never chose to become Catholic but was faithful to God, church laws, and had her bible next to her bed. I remember it had a red leather cover with her name printed in gold in the corner. This could only impress a child thinking how cool was that!

My mom had numerous health issues. One day when I was 7 years old, she was extremely ill and I ran to my room, knelt crying as hard as I possibly could and began to pray to Mary, the Blessed Mother, to help my mom. In the distress of this moment, I could feel a hand on my shoulder and a calming voice comforting me. No physical image, but she was there. It was a very real felt presence with her hand on my shoulder. Mary would always be my mother, friend and companion.

Years later, when I entered my community to become a Sister of St. Francis, my mom gave me a beautiful Venetian glass statue of Mary. I am sure my mom pondered lots in her heart as she could not understand my choice in life - my yes to God's call. This statue is my most valued possession. With the variegated colored glass of blues and purples, I call it my pregnant Mary, for as the light shines through she appears to be so. She is pregnant with the Light of the world.

Mary gave birth to her son in a very real way. Every cell of his body developed from Mary's body. Through her body, God took on human form, passed through the darkness of the birth canal and into the light. He is flesh and blood, bone and water. He not only entered the light of day, but was the **LIGHT OF THE WORLD. THE WORD MADE FLESH!**

Good going Mary! In the words of St. Francis of Assisi....

“Hail his Dwelling, Hail his Tabernacle, Hail his Robe, Hail, the Virgin made Church.”

Following the law, her child was circumcised and she named him Jesus just as she agreed at that moment of annunciation and fiat. “Be it done unto me according to your word.” It could only have been a profound experience of the Spirit alive and at work within her. She said yes to God and a lifetime of wonder, confusion, joy and pain. She would be known through all generations as blessed, Mother of mercy, Mother of good counsel, Mother of the refugees, Mother of the homeless, the dying,

nonviolent, widows, unwed mothers, of political prisoners, and condemned and executed criminals. She would be a sign and source of hope for the oppressed. In her Magnificat proclamation of faith, she is prophet. Theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, writes and reflects on Mary as, “Friend of God and Prophet.”

“Her spirit rejoices in God... Not to her only but to all the poor — bringing the mighty down from their thrones, exalting the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, sending the unrepentant rich away empty—all this in fulfillment of the ancient promise... Mary in solidarity with the project of the coming reign of God whose intent is to heal, redeem and liberate.”

As children, we may have related to Mary in our beautiful childlike ways, but as we grow into spiritual maturity, we can go deeper and look to Mary in new ways. Our own prophetic imagination, through Baptism, enables us to do so. She can accompany us when we contemplate the Spirit alive and at work within each of us and all of creation. In turn, we say yes and respond to the needs of our time. Like Mary, “God sent the Spirit of the Son of God into our Hearts.”

Mary gave birth to Jesus, Jesus rose from the darkness of the tomb to give us the Spirit and now it is for us to give life to Christ in an on-going mutuality of co-creating our worlds. She gave birth to the New Creation and we in our own spiritual journeys move from the womb, to tomb, to a new creation. In times of darkness, our faith demands, like Mary, to be a sign of hope. In everyday life Mary is our model of discipleship, to give birth to and proclaim the WORD, as we give witness to Christ within and among us. Mary is woman of wisdom and grace, our mother, sister, companion, advocate, friend and prophet.

When we gather at the Eucharist today let us imagine Mary as a living prayer. She is the Theotokos, the God-bearer. We are called to be and do the same. “Only Christ-bearers can restore the world to life and give humanity back the vitality of love.” – C. Houselander

Because of Mary we can nurture a personal relationship with God in an intimate and personal way. She was the first to say his name, Jesus. We are desired by Jesus himself to be in communication and in communion with him. Because of Mary we can call God, Jesus, in prayer, and praise his Holy Name.

May Jesus bless you...let his face shine upon you, be gracious to you and give you peace!

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