

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 1st 2013

Today the Church celebrates the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. This is also the titular feast of the Society of Jesus, the naming of the Child Jesus (although, starting in 2013, this titular feast will be moved to January 3 in the revised liturgical calendar proper to the Society of Jesus). Since this reflection is not primarily addressed to my fellow Jesuits, I will focus it on the solemnity celebrated by the entire Church.

Every celebration of Mary seems to carry with it some inherent ambiguity, not because of what we celebrate, but because of how we celebrate it. One dimension of this ambiguity lies in the fact that we extol Mary, as indeed we should. But we proclaim her so excellent, that we risk declaring her implicitly inimitable/inaccessible and, in placing her beyond imitation reach, we feel excused from trying to be more like her.

There is a beautiful hymn from the early Church that Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians: Jesus, being in the form of God, did not cling to his being equal to God...[2:6]. Perhaps paradoxically I catch myself at times reversing the attitude reflected in that hymn. I rather cling to my not being equal to God, so as to excuse myself from having more Christ-like attitudes: “fine for Jesus, he was the Son of God; fine for Mary, she was the Mother of God; but I am just a 'pedestrian', I cannot be held to such high standards”.

It is all too obvious that none of us can be Mother of God and that none of us will be taken up to heaven without experiencing corruption. But Mary's greatness does not lie primarily in what she did, but rather in what she allowed God to do with and in her, in her total availability to God's desire for her. It is her inner attitude that is exemplary for us more importantly than what resulted from that attitude. What is truly great in Mary is that, being as human as we are, she remained always available to what God was asking of her, without clinging to her not being equal to God. We risk missing this point in extolling Mary.

Luis Rodriguez, SJ