

Mary, the Holy Mother of God - A  
Numbers 6:22-27;  
Galatians 4:4-7;  
Luke 2:16-21  
Little Flower - 1/1/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish you all a most blessed and happy New Year.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the Octave Day of Christmas. Pope Paul VI also designated January 1<sup>st</sup> as the World Day of Prayer for Peace and Justice. Finally, today we celebrate New Year's Day. Liturgically, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

Mary's most ancient title was the Greek word *Theotokos* or God-bearer. This title was rooted in today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Galatians: "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...*" As we celebrate this Solemnity, the most important of Mary's feasts, it is important to understand what we celebrate. Many non-Catholic Christians struggle with calling Mary the Mother of God. They are more comfortable calling Mary the Mother of Jesus. They ask how can Mary, a woman born in space and time, be the mother of the Son of God who has existed from all eternity. The Catholic answer is that mother-son denotes a relationship between two persons. Since Jesus is one divine person, the Son of God, Mary cannot be the mother of Jesus without being the mother of the Son of God. Today, then, I would suggest we remember and celebrate the important relationship within our lives, both past and present.

Today I would also like to suggest that we all resolve this year to strive to recognize more clearly the presence of Jesus within and among us. Someone once said that there is within us someone who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Someone else said essentially the same thing: there is within us someone who knows us better than we know ourselves. St. Paul captured this in his letter to the Galatians: "*As proof that you are sons, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'*"

In my Christmas homily, I mentioned that Jesus is among us in his Word, in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and in his Spirit. Especially when we hear or read the Gospels, we need to read or hear them as the Word of God, i.e., the living Word of God speaking to our hearts today, not simply as words about God. Second, when we receive the Eucharist, we need to believe that we are receiving the true Body and Blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine, not simply a symbol or sign of Christ's Body and Blood.

Finally, and most challenging, we want to recognize Christ's presence in others and in love. We need to see the face of Christ in the faces of others. It is easy to see the face of Christ in those whom we love or who love us as family or friends. It is much more difficult to see the face of Christ in those whom we do not know or love and those who do not know or love us. We also need to recognize the presence of Christ wherever there is authentic love, i.e., love that is self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing.

My brothers and sisters, today is New Year's Day. Today we thank God for all the blessings of this past year and ask his continued blessings upon us in the New Year. Today's first reading offers an appropriate blessing for the New Year:

*The LORD bless you and keep you!  
The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!  
The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!*