

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

My Brothers and Sisters,

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

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

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, it is important to understand what we celebrate. Since mother-son denotes a relationship between two persons and since Jesus is one divine person, the Son of God, Mary cannot be the mother of the human Jesus without also being the mother of the Son of God.

Today is the most important feast of Mary because it is the basis of all the other favors God bestowed on her. If Mary was conceived without original sin, it was because God had chosen her to be the mother of his Son. If Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her life, it was because she said yes to God's plan and conceived and gave birth to Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

Today is also the Octave Day of Christmas. In the Church, octaves are eight day celebrations of one feast. The Octave Day of Christmas has had an interesting history. When I was little, January 1 was the feast of the Circumcision of Jesus. In fact, in those days, this feast had the shortest Gospel, one verse, the last verse of today's Gospel: "*When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" When that feast was suppressed, today became simply the Octave Day of Christmas. It was during this time that Pope Paul VI designated it the World Day of Prayer for Peace and Justice. Finally, it became what it is today, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

As we begin this New Year, I would like to suggest that we all resolve 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. 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!'*" Jesus is within and among us in his Word, in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and in his Spirit living within us.

Likewise, 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. On this World Day of Prayer for Peace and Justice, let us pray for peace and harmony within our families, our Church, our city, and our country and throughout the world. At the same time, we need to ask for a new outpouring of God's 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!