

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
31 Dec.-1 January, 2017

Beholding the Face of God

Readings: Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2: 16-21

Today we close the Octave of Christmas with a commemoration of the divine motherhood of Mary, a belief in faith that because she bore to humanity our Redeemer, and is rightly said to be invoked as “Mother of God,” or *Theotokos*, literally the “God-bearer,” an ancient title.

One of the reasons we read this passage from the Book of Numbers on the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is that it attests to her roots in the ancient traditions of the Hebrew people. The Israelites treasured a blessing given by God through a priest, a chosen instrument of God. This is called the threefold blessing (benediction) of Aaron, and is presented to Aaron through his brother Moses.

It meant that God’s favor was on them in a special way. The blessing remains one of the enduring passages from all of the Old Testament. To invoke the Lord’s name upon the people was here reserved to the sons of Aaron and is given in the singular, one-to-one relationship that God has with each believer. The blessing ends with an invocation of peace, in Hebrew *Shalom*. It includes the idea of happiness, good health, prosperity, friendship, and general well-being.¹

In the Temple the priests recited the blessing twice daily, while they stood on a special platform, known as the *dukhan*. In the synagogue the blessing was recited by the priests while standing in front of the Ark.² The lifting of God’s face is seen to be a gesture of favor. For example in Psalm 4 we read: “Many say, ‘May we see better times! LORD, show us the light of your face!’” or in Psalm 31: “Let your face shine on your servant,” as just two examples.

¹ Cf. New American Bible footnote on Numbers 626.

² See “The Priestly Blessing,” at www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-priestly-blessing.
Article by Rabbia Louis Jacobs

This is important because it is equally true according to the Jewish mindset that in difficult times, God hid His face, that He had abandoned his people: “But when you hid your face, I was struck with terror.”(Psalm 30:8) So to live in the “light of God’s face”, in His presence, is to live the very purpose for which we were created.

As we begin a new calendar year, we do so under the patronage of the Blessed Mother, a woman truly blessed beyond measure by God. In her, we have a most worthy and efficacious intercessor, one who surely will protect us, and usher us into the presence of her Son, our Lord and Savior, so that we might see the face of God.

If we invite the Lord to lead our lives in 2017, and not just to be around, but to truly guide our steps, we will not feel abandoned. We will experience more “wholeness’ this year. We will be in His presence.

Our Gospel today tells us how the shepherds first received the blessing of being in the position to recognize Jesus as the Savior. Of course, as a result, they also accepted the responsibility of sharing the good news of the Savior’s birth. But that privilege was given to the simple.

The Shepherds saw the Lord Jesus in the manger, and when they saw Him, they made known the message. They beheld the face of God. But notice something else. The Biblical account in Luke’s Gospel focuses not so much on the response of Mary, as much as on the shepherds. We are simply told that she kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. She allowed the shepherds to proclaim to the world, while she remained simple and lowly.

Mary's simple and unreserved acceptance of God's plan, within the context of human history. At its root, today's solemnity is about our salvation, and our imitation of her fidelity and trust.

Scripture is silent, but we cannot help but wonder if perhaps the attention of the shepherds was a little overwhelming. Today's Solemnity recalls that this happened because a maiden knelt down at the appearance of God's messenger and responded with the unconditional gift of herself, saying "Be it done to me according to you Word."

As our spiritual mother, she intercedes for us and for our families. How profitable for us to go to her frequently. Why not consider carrying a rosary (or Rosary ring) with you, having it ready at hand for a moment of prayer, even if it is but a decade or two? When you are caught in traffic, calm down and pray a decade or two.

As we begin a new calendar year, how appropriate that we begin by opening ourselves to God's plan for our lives. The Church gives us a model, and we mark Sacred Time, not by the dropping of a ball in Times Square or the Top Ten Lists, but by the chief events of our salvation history. We begin the Year of the Lord 2017 recognizing that this year, belongs to Him. He is the Lord of all time.

We would do well to emulate the example of our Blessed Mother in treasuring all things in our hearts, entrusting this upcoming year to her intercession and protection. Because she believed, we have been blessed. Because she gave a definitive "Yes," another year of grace is made possible for us who remain.