

## **Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

Today's celebration of the Solemnity of Mary as the Mother of God brings to a close the Octave of Christmas – meaning, our proper celebration of Christmas comes to an end today, although the season continues on through the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas, called Epiphany, and comes to an official end with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. And honoring Mary in such a way today honestly makes complete sense, since she is the mother of the Son of God, whose birth we just celebrated one week ago.

But really, when we think about it, Mary is connected with Jesus for the whole of His life – during those “silent years” until at His Baptism at the age of 30 or so, when He began His public ministry; at the wedding feast at Cana, where Mary interceded before Jesus, which led Him to perform His first miracle; and, all the way to the bitter end, as she stood below Him on His cross at Calvary. There is a very close relationship between them, as there is between every child and his or her mother. And yet, there is something about their relationship that is quite unlike any other relationship between mother and child – for Jesus was God-made-flesh – Mary's Creator and Mary's Savior. Therefore, while she had a very human relationship with Jesus, and at the same time, she had a very spiritual and sacred relationship with Him too. So, imagine mothers (and fathers), if you think it's difficult raising your children – how do you even begin to parent the Son of God?!

I think we get a profound insight into what this must have been like for Mary, for as we hear in today's Gospel: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." The Greek word translated as "reflecting" also means "to ponder" and "to encounter". Certainly there was a lot for Mary to reflect on and ponder over. But at the end of the day, no amount of logic, insights, or reasoning was ever going to provide her with satisfactory explanations. Rather, it was encounter that was the key. To encounter someone is to meet them face-to-face. Interestingly enough, today we hear in the first reading the words of the Aaronic Blessing: "The Lord let His face shine upon you". And Mary has seen God's face shine upon her in a way unlike any other human being has. And yet, she has given a human face to God, so that all of us can truly and ponder Him too!

But, how do we have an encounter with someone who is no longer walking this earth? How do we have a relationship with someone whose face we can no longer see? That is what the life of the Church is all about – helping us to encounter Jesus Christ as His People – in the Mass, in the sacraments, in the Bible (which is the very Word of God), in prayer and devotions, etc., etc. But if all we ever do is encounter Jesus in a group setting (i.e. "at church"), then we will more likely than not know about Him, and perhaps even love Him, but we will not have an intimate and personal relationship with Him. Or, take me, for example. Many of you know me in the setting here at church, but you don't know me intimately or personally: which is why sometimes it can catch people off guard when they see me at the grocery store or the movies – Father Marcoe eats and likes Star Wars?!

My friends, we are called to have an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus. Church, Mass, the sacraments, prayer, morality – these are not the ends of the spiritual life – these are the means to truly enable us to grow in personal relationship with our Lord. And Mary is our model for this encounter. She pondered and treasured and reflected upon what was happening to her in light of her relationship with her Divine Son. If we want a real relationship with Christ, then we must do the same thing. In other words, we must cultivate a meaningful prayer life where we are in real communion and communication with God.

As Sarah Young, the author of one of my favorite devotionals, *Jesus Calling*, writes about her own journey of prayer in the introduction to her book: “I began to wonder if I could change my prayer times from monologue to dialogue. I had been writing in prayer journals for many years, but this was one-way communication: I did all the talking. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God might want to communicate to me on a given day. I decided to “listen” with pen in hand, writing down whatever I “heard” in my mind...This is how I was listening to Him – by focusing on Jesus and His Word, while asking Him to guide my thoughts. I was *not* listening for an audible voice; I was spending time *seeking God’s Face*...This practice of being still in God’s Presence has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline...”

Pope Benedict XVI, knew so well of the absolute centrality of having a personal encounter with Jesus, which He writes about in his encyclical, *God is Love*: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person [Jesus Christ], which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction... Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason... [we] need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens [our] love and opens [our] spirits to others.”

To close I'd like to offer the prayer Pope Benedict himself composed at the end of this very encyclical: Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son – the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God's call and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world.” God bless you.