

Homily for Mary, the Mother of God

Has anyone ever asked you to define a word before? Maybe it was a young child or a person whose first language wasn't English? It might be a word you use all the time, but then you go to define it – without using the word in the definition – and you find it's a lot harder than you thought. Maybe words like “good” or “interesting”. Well, the word “blessing” might fall into this category as well. We say “God bless you” or “we've been so blessed” quite frequently, and yet it's kind of hard to really get a good understanding of what we mean by “blessing”. While, it can mean several things, a good overall definition would be “favor”. Blessings are unmerited favors given to someone out of the kindness of another person.

Typically, we think of God's blessings towards us – since He is the giver of all good gifts, both human and divine. And one of the most blessed humans ever to live could be said to be the Mother of God – the Blessed Virgin Mary. When Mary goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, she says to her, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb”. And acknowledging God's favor to her in reply, Mary says, “from now on all generations will call me blessed”.

We see that Mary's response to all the blessings bestowed on her by God is one of gratitude and thankfulness. BUT, what about all the difficulty she would have with Joseph, who was thinking of separating from her in secret amid all the turmoil? Or, what about the pressure and anxiety of having to flee to Egypt to escape the terror of King Herod, who was killing male children under three years old? And, what about the fear and uncertainty of what it would mean to have a sword pierce her own heart, as the Prophet Simeon said to her in the Temple, when she and Joseph presented the Christ child? Certainly, there would have been enough stuff to complain about and dread. And most of it wasn't even her idea – it was God's! But yet, Mary chose the better part. She was grateful for the blessings she had received, treasuring them in her heart, and she chose to dwell on these – the blessings, not the troubles!

Similarly, when we look back on this past year of 2015, we will each find a mix of good and bad – things we are definitely thankful for and things we definitely wish would have turned out different. Things like the mass shootings in Charleston, Paris, and San Bernadino, the refugee crisis in Europe, perhaps even personal family struggles may come to mind. But also, things like the powerful visit of Pope Francis to our country, the end of the African Ebola outbreak, the great Jubilee Year of Mercy, perhaps even personal family joys may also come to mind.

As we know, this year – and each and every year of human history – was all full of ups and downs. The question is – which will we choose to remember and hold on to? Often it's very easy for us to dwell upon the negatives and the things we feel not so blessed about. And yet, our heavenly Mother, Mary, shows us the contrary should be the case: we should focus on the many and varied ways that God has favored us, in ways often undeserving to us. So, let us give thanks to our God for His blessings of this past year, both big and small, and let us look for His blessings in the new year to come as well. May God ***bless*** you.