

Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2023

OUR NEED FOR ONE ANOTHER

It's New Year's Day. It's the Eighth Day of Christmas and the celebration of Mary, Mother of God, the oldest feast in honor of the Blessed Mother. For those unfamiliar with that title it may seem shocking, scandalous or even blasphemous. Mother of God? How can God, the origin of all life and the origin of everything, have a mother?

This celebration of Mary, Mother of God, obviously doesn't mean that Mary existed before God the way our mothers existed before us. But it does tell us something about Jesus. Throughout the entire Christmas season, in different ways, we celebrate the fact that in the person of Jesus, through what we call the Incarnation, literally, the enfleshment, that God became human in the person of Jesus. And then in the early Church there were fierce arguments about the person of Jesus? Was he God? Was he human? Was he human but became God?

Throughout all of this, like a bell ringing on a clear winter night, the Church said, no, no, no, no, no. There is one Jesus. There is one Christ, truly God and truly human. The title, Mother of God, is significant for what it tells us about Mary but it's even more significant for what it tells us about Jesus. It's not as if there's a divine Jesus over here and a human Jesus over there. There's one Jesus. If Jesus is truly God, then Mary can be called the Mother of God, just as a mother of a doctor can be called a mother of a doctor. Mary, the mother of God, reminds us that the journey of faith is of personal relationships

This celebration reminds us that Jesus is truly God and truly human. Truly God in order to save us. Truly human to give us an example. Mary as *Mother of God*, tells us that Jesus is truly God. Mary as *Mother* of God, tells us that Jesus is truly human. Ours is a historical religion based not on ideas or concepts floating around but rather that in the person of Jesus, God came in the flesh, into our world, in a real, concrete, visible, tactual way. He came with a body and he received that body from Mary. Karl Rahner was a 20th century theologian who remarked that theological concepts don't have mothers. To honor Mary under the title of Mother of God, serves to preserve the great mystery of the Incarnation—that God has entered our world as one of us, truly God and truly human.

There are two great gifts that Mary gave Jesus. One is obvious, the other less so. Obviously, Mary gave Jesus the gift of a human life. His humanity came through her. However, implicit in that, she gave him something else. Not only did she give him the ability to live a human life. She gave him the ability to die a human death.

The twentieth century spiritual writer Caryl Houselander bluntly states: *In giving life to Him she was giving Him death. Unless she would give Him the capacity for suffering, He could not suffer....That is what it meant for Mary to give human nature to God. He was invulnerable; He asked her for a body to be wounded.* In Jesus, God comes to share a human life with us in all things but sin. He comes to share a human death with us and through that death and resurrection, he calls us to new life with him.

Despite being the Prince of Peace, the life of Jesus was marked by violence, it was framed by violence. As a child, he and his family had to flee violence and Jesus died a violent death. If Jesus' life is marked by violence, so too is the life of Mary.

It's appropriate that this Celebration of Mary, Mother of God is also the World Day of Peace. This is the fifty-sixth year of this celebration and in his annual message for this day, Pope Francis reflections on the trauma and dark of Covid-19 that has affected the lives of everyone. He suggests that after three years it is time to question, learn, grow and be transformed, noting that we emerge from a crisis better or worse but never the same.

The Holy Father says, *the greatest lesson we learned from Covid-19 was the realization that we all need one another. That our greatest and yet most fragile treasure is our shared humanity....and that none of us can be saved alone.* You could add to his comment by saying that we journey to God not by ourselves but that we journey to God together, as pilgrims on a journey, as members of the Body of Christ that we call the Church. The Pope notes that this long, painful experience calls us to be changed, no longer thinking just of ourselves or national interests but in terms of the common good. In other words, not to become trapped in the prison of our own ego. He calls us to be artisans of peace in our world today.

The Virgin Mary as Mother of God and as mother of the Prince of Peace was an artisan of peace. To share in the Mass, to listen to the word of God, to reflect as the gospel tells us Mary did, and to be present as the word continues to be made flesh and

dwell among us under the form of bread and wine, is to attend a school of peace. To strive to live a life of intentional faith is to be an artisan of peace. This coming year, assisted by the prayers of Mary, the Mother of God and inspired by her example and that of so many others, and most of all, by Jesus himself, may each of us, each in our own way become an artisan for peace in our hearts, our homes, our communities and our world.