

Mary Mother of God  
1/1/2021

## RUDDER AND COMPASS

When I was about nine or ten, one summer day the doorbell rang and there was a sweet, grandmotherly woman, with a child. She was from the Jehovah Witnesses. She said that some people call Mary the mother of God but how could God have a mother? My mother and I listened to her but I don't remember a whole lot more after that.

It's New Year's Day, the Eighth Day of Christmas and the celebration of Mary, Mother of God. For those unfamiliar with that title, such as the kind woman at the door that day, 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 and who he is. Throughout the entire Christmas season, in different ways, we celebrate the fact that in the person of Jesus, through what we call the Incarnation or 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 taught that 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 the mother of a doctor.

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. One 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian quipped 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. Mary gives us an example. She shows us what it is to live a life of intentional faith and we're told she reflected on what had happened.

Despite being the Prince of Peace, the life of Jesus was marked by violence, it was framed by violence. If Jesus' life is marked by violence, so too is the life of Mary. She had to flee with her child in the middle of the night and then watched him cruelly receive capital punishment before her eyes

It's appropriate that this Celebration of Mary, Mother of God is also the World Day of Prayer for Peace. In his annual message for this day, Pope Francis speaks of, *A culture of care as a path to peace*. The Holy Father sees *A culture of care as a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our times*.

He points out that God is the source of our human vocation to care and that God the creator is the model of care. He goes on to speak about care in the ministry of Jesus and how this is carried on in the social doctrine of the Church which gives a *grammar of care* affirming the dignity of every person. The Pope notes that this dignity is the basis not only for human rights but for human responsibilities, especially to those most in need.

As a sidebar, I would point out that this notion of the dignity of the human person dovetails nicely with our Declaration of Independence which insists that all people are created equal.

Pope Francis says that respecting human dignity is the *rudder* for the ship of humanity while the social teaching of the Church gives us a *compass* for a more humane future.

With this rudder and compass we continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, in its different dimensions. Inspired by the example and assisted by

the prayers of Mary, the Mother of God, and nourished by the Eucharist may we, with lives of intentional faith, work to build up a culture of care and so build a path to peace in this new year and always.