

On the first day of the New Year we have the joy and the grace of celebrating the solemn feast of the Most Holy Mother of God and, at the same time, celebrating the 52nd World Day of Peace.

In both these events we are celebrating Christ, Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary and our true peace! Today, the gospel tells us that Mary pondered all these mysteries in her heart we are invited to reflect on the unique status of the Virgin Mary – her Divine Motherhood, and as a mother, her prayers for her child Jesus, and her prayers for us today.

After all, every time we pray the Hail Mary we say; “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death”. We recognize Mary as the Mother who prays for us, our special intercessor. But you know, it wasn’t always like that.

There were many arguments about what all these mysteries meant in the early church. Especially with Arius and Nestorius, church leaders who questioned the divinity of Jesus, and so if Jesus wasn’t fully God, then Mary could not be the Mother of God.

But another bishop, Cyril of Alexandria, wrote: “I am astonished that the question should ever have been raised as to whether the Holy Virgin should be called Mother of God, for it really amounts to asking, Is her Son God, or is He not?”

So a council of 200 bishops met in the year 431, and concluded its business in a single day and Mary was formally proclaimed the Mother of God.

When the people who waited outside the church heard the decision, they broke into joyous shouts of “Mother of God!, Mother of God!” They formed a torch-light procession to escort the bishops to their lodgings. And this led to our celebration of this feast day today.

During the reformation, the role of Mary was called in to question again as many protestant leaders saw the act of praying to Mary as a form of worship that must be reserved for God alone.

They didn’t understand that the prayers were not worshipping Mary, but rather simply beseeching her as our mother, to intercede with her divine Son and the Father on our behalf. Mary certainly never claimed to be God or wanted to be God.

The Church puts the feast of this solemnity on the first day of the New Year to emphasize the importance of Mary’s role in the life of Christ and of the Church. We commemorate the various saints on different days of the year, but Mary is the most prominent of them all.

The World Day of Peace is also remembered on the same day as the Solemnity of Mary. It was first celebrated on January 1st, 1968, and was inspired by the encyclicals of Pope John 23rd – “Pacem in Terris” (which means Peace on Earth) and of Pope Paul the 6th – “Populorum Progressio” (which means the Development of Peoples) and linked peace and justice.

Even our first reading today tells us that God told us to bless people by saying, "May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace"

In this season of peace, we remember that everything flourishes like new because God has appeared in our midst.

Mary shows the Infant Jesus to the shepherds of Bethlehem, who rejoice and praise the Lord. Our Church renews this mystery for people of every generation, Mary shows us God's face so that, with his Blessing, we may walk on the path of peace.

Today's Liturgy also reminds us that the Blessed Virgin is Mother of the Church and Mother of each one of her members, that is, Mother of each one of us, in Christ.

Now when we say Jesus is the Word, the Word made flesh, we mean that the Word was conceived in Mary and she gave birth to Jesus.

The Word is planted in each one of us as well when we read and listen to scripture and like Mary we are called to nurture that word and see that it grows and takes on life – we bear the Word for the world to see to let the world see the face of God in our faces.

We celebrate Mary our mother because we are all called to be like her. Pope emeritus Benedict the 16th says that the Lord wants to make his love for humanity known and entrusts to each one, in all the different ministries and responsibilities we have, the mission of proclaiming his word of truth and of witnessing to charity and solidarity.

Mary is the primary intercessor with her Son, but we can't just sit back and let her do it alone! We are all called to be intercessors for each other, for the world. To be witnesses for love and peace as Jesus was, then Jesus has to be born and carried in each one of us – one at a time and together as a church.

It takes courage to be a witness for peace in a world that would rather solve its problems with violence! But when you give the time to God to ponder his mysteries in your heart as our Mother Mary did then be prepared that just like Mary, when you truly listen to God, your life will never be the same.

Jesus himself will help us, when we receive him in the Eucharist, so that the Word is present not only through our ears but in our very own bodies as well.

This is important because when Jesus is part of our body, he is part of us, so that means Mary is truly our Mother in the flesh, not just symbolically in the spirit.

We pray together today that this season of Christmas will remind us of how God came to save us of his own free will by taking on our humanity and giving us his divine life – that it will remind us that it is only by opening ourselves to God's love, as our mother Mary did, that human action is changed and transformed.

When Mary looks down on us, she doesn't see sinners, she sees her children. Pope Francis says that we are called to see the face of the Child Jesus in the faces of children we see around the world, hollowed by hunger and disease, disfigured by suffering and desperation, faces that become a silent appeal to our responsibility for justice and peace.

When we consider their helpless plight, all the false justifications of war and violence fall away. We are called to greater efforts for projects of peace, to lay down every kind of weapon and work together to build a world that is worthier of the children of God, of Mary's children.

This is what every earthly mother prays for. This is what Mary, God's Mother, prays for. On this day of new resolutions, can we all resolve to ponder the ways in which we can each fulfill that prayer.