

[Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 76; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21]

As we celebrate today the maternity of Mary, Mary being the Mother of God, we might hearken to a more sentimental “holiday” which is celebrated the second Sunday in May – Mother’s Day. What kind of “Mother’s Day” card would Jesus select for Mary? The first message that comes to mind is “To the Best Mother in the World – Ever!” That would be an understatement!

Jesus would probably “care enough to send the very best” as Hallmark touts. But being both God and man, Jesus might think of writing a personal note inside the card, instead of or in addition to offering a pre-printed one. Something like, “Blessed are you among women.” He might sign it, “With all My love, Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb.” Perhaps sometime today you can think of what YOU would write inside a Mother’s Day card for Mary for HER Mother’s Day!

Look at the prayers offered at the Mass for today’s Feast. We pray, not TO Mary, but THROUGH Mary. There is a big difference. Mary is not the Fourth Person of the Holy Trinity. She is a totally human being who was filled with grace; the fullness of God is within her, as when the angel Gabriel says, “Hail, full of grace.” The best way we honor Mary is to honor her Son. We address our prayers today to God our Father, asking that we might “profit by the prayers” of Mary. We can assume that when Mary was on earth, she prayed constantly.

Perhaps it was her example of making a holy place in a corner of her modest home that taught Jesus that when He really wanted to pray, He left the noise and the crowds and would go into solitude on a hillside, up a mountain, in a garden. Children learn how to pray by following the example of their parents.

Son of God though He was, Jesus must have relied in His humanity on Mary’s prayers during His public ministry when things got difficult. We can imagine Mary extending her hands over Jesus and singing the words which come from today’s First Reading from the Book of Numbers. It is a familiar blessing first pronounced when the wandering Jews finally made it to the Promised Land.

What a powerful and comforting image it is for us to think of Mary praying this way for us and for all of humanity. From her throne in Heaven, she looks down upon us, her children, and sings her blessing prayer to and for us. She intercedes for us like a good mother pleading to a compassionate Father when we have done wrong, or when we are struggling or when we are in need.

She also teaches us to slow down, to stop, to listen and to think: "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." We see Mary's human but faithful response to a puzzling situation. The shepherds rush, then pause, then rush again to spread the Good News. They are reflecting, too.

The Prayer over the Gifts and the Preface for today's Mass speak of "the beginning of our salvation" through Mary and beg that "our salvation will be brought to fulfillment." Without Mary's "Yes" at the Annunciation, that fulfillment would not be possible.

On a day devoted to both Mary and praying for peace, it is striking to think of how much violence Mary was close to. As a betrothed but unwed mother, she faced the possibility of death by stoning. Then she found out that the king wanted her child, along with many others, dead, and conducted genocide to accomplish his goal. Finally, she had to witness the violent death of her son on a cross. Violence and death, though, are not the whole story, then or now. Peace can grow in the ashes of violence, and new life can come out of death. That's what happens in God's way of doing things. Pray for peace today, both for yourself and the world. But don't only pray; do something to help bring peace to conflict.

Today's Second Reading from Galatians is the only time in ALL of St. Paul's letters that he refers to Mary, and even then he doesn't mention her by name! He simply says, Jesus was "born of a woman." But because of this, you and I are re-born through the waters of Baptism. That makes us sons and daughters of God, and heirs to the Kingdom. But God needed a human mother to cooperate in this plan of salvation. God "cared enough" to send us "the very best" in Jesus and Mary. Here is my "Mother's Day" message to Mary:

Thank you, Mary, our Blessed Mother, for being formed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. For being prepared from the moment of your conception in the womb of Ann, your mother, to become the Mother of our Savior.

May we keep all the things that happen to us by the hand of God and by the realities of life, reflecting on them in our hearts. May we praise and glorify God like those poor but strong shepherds, for all that your Son does for us.

Thank you for being our Blessed and faithful and loving Mother. Bless us as we begin another year of faith, formation, stewardship, evangelization and discipleship in the service of your Son's people. Holy Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us! AMEN!