



Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God, 1st January 2023

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“In giving ourselves we discover ourselves.”

This Christmas King Charles III gave his first Christmas Day Address. It was particularly noteworthy for Christians; he said some years ago he had fulfilled a lifelong ambition to visit the Manger of Bethlehem. He said he stood in reverence before the silver star marking the place where Jesus was born: it meant more than he could express to be in the spot where the light had come into the world. He concluded: “In that life-giving light we can find hope for the future.”

On the Octave of Christmas, 1st January we turn to Mary, the Holy Mother of Jesus, and across the world, we pray for Peace at the beginning of the New Year. This was first introduced by Pope St. Paul VI in 1968, and though in England and Wales we have another date in the Calendar for Peace Sunday, we will be joining Pope Francis in praying for Peace in a world which “is suffering a Famine of Peace” as he said on Christmas Day. We need the Peace and the light of Christ more than ever in our fractured world.

In the Collect for the Mass of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, we pray: “grant ... that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.” In the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer for the Mass, the Celebrant prays: “by the by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit she ..., brought forth into the world the eternal Light, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I was fortunate some years ago to be able to visit Ephesus in present day Turkey. It was at the Council of Ephesus that Mary was declared to be “Mother of God”, and there is the home of St. John, where she went to live in his care. It is a special place of Pilgrimage today. Sunday Connection published by Loyola Press contains notes commenting on Sundays and Feasts: in its notes on the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God, the focus is on her faithfulness to God. It says: “she was able to receive the gift of God’s Son and accept her role in God’s plan for salvation” because of her faithfulness. It goes on: “By doing so, she models for us the faith of discipleship and is also called “Mother of the Church”.

Our call to discipleship should be modelled on 3 aspects evident in Mary’s life: first, prayer and reflection on the events of our lives that we might see God’s presence and work in our lives; second, discipleship means obedience to God and God’s will; third, discipleship includes fidelity to a community of faith.

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The commentary grounds all 3 in the Gospel for this Solemnity where she is described first as a reflective person, keeping the reports of the sheperds in her heart; second obedient in naming the baby 'Jesus' as the Angel directed; third, in Mary and Joseph observing the Jewish tradition by having Jesus circumcised.

Fr. Ferlita, whose commentaries are invariable stimulating, speaks of Mary as our "teacher" in his book "The Paths of Life", because she is prime witness to a "new beginning" drawing on Pope St. John Paul's document "The Dignity of Woman", *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Considering the words of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth when she visited her as she was about to give birth to John the Baptist: "He who is mighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:49). While these words can refer to her conceiving "the Son of the Most High" they can signify the woman who discovers herself "by means of a sincere gift of self". Ferlita writes: "Maybe that's the first thing Mary has to teach us: that in giving ourselves we discover ourselves; that is, we discover what we have to give."

In 2013 Pope Emeritus Benedict, celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica for the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, 1 January. The Holy Father said that Mary shows "the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events which we often do not grasp and which disconcert us." He proposed Mary's serenity as the source of interior peace and as the foundation of world peace. We make his concluding words ours today: "May the Virgin Mary, whom today we venerate with the title Mother of God, help us to contemplate the face of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May she sustain us and accompany us in this New Year; and obtain for us and for the whole world the gift of peace. Amen!"

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