



Solemnity of Mary Mother of God: Queen of Peace 1 January 2024
Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“May the Lord uncover His face to you and bring you peace”
(Numbers 6)

In recent months I have heard people say: “I don’t listen to the News anymore; all that is going on across the world is so depressing.” And, they are right: the horror of what is taking place in the Holy Land especially in Israel and Gaza; a conflict that is now threatening Lebanon. The war that has enveloped Ukraine; the conflict in Nigeria; the continuing war in the Congo and conflict in Cameroon. You could go on.

Monday 1st January is the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God; it is also World Day of Prayer for Peace (an intention put before us in our Ordo – the Calendar for Celebration of the Liturgy – on 14 January). I noted that Pope Francis combined these two: The Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, and World Day of Prayer for Peace in his Homily for 1st January 2023: *“let us place the New Year under the protection of Mary.”*

He said in St Peter’s Basilica on January 1st: *“The New Year begins under the sign of the Mother. A mother’s gaze is the path to rebirth and growth. We need mothers, women who look at the world not to exploit it, but so that it can have life”.*

“At the beginning of this New Year, then, let us place ourselves under the protection of this woman, the Mother of God, who is also our mother. May she help us to keep and ponder all things, unafraid of trials and with the joyful certainty that the Lord is faithful and can transform every cross into a resurrection”.

In his Homily, the Pope said that the Virgin Mary teaches us how to *“keep and to ponder”*. To reflect upon and to accept life as it comes, in times of both joy and suffering.

“Mary’s perseverance is the expression of a mature, adult faith, not a faith of beginners”. Pope Francis encouraged people to have the same attitude as Mary when faced with unexpected problems or troubling situations. *“She shows us that it is necessary: it is the narrow path to achieve the goal, the cross, without which there is no resurrection. Like the pangs of childbirth, it begets a more mature faith”*, he said. *“Many are frightened about the future, dangers stemming from the ecological crisis, injustices and by global economic imbalances. Looking at Mary with her Son in her arms, I think of young mothers and their children fleeing wars and famine, or waiting in refugee camps. There are so many of them”*. Courtney Mares of the Catholic News Agency continues her report on the Homily of Pope Francis who recalled that January 1 marks the World Day of Peace, instituted by

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Pope St Paul VI in 1968, and concluding: *“We can only build peace if we have peace in our hearts, only if we receive it from the Prince of Peace. But peace is also our commitment: it asks us to take the first step, it demands concrete actions. It is built by being attentive to the least, by promoting justice, with the courage to forgive thus extinguishing the fire of hatred. At the beginning of this year, may the Mother of God, the Queen of Peace, obtain harmony in our hearts and in the entire world”*. Pope Francis said.

We are familiar with Mary being called the “Holy Mother of God”. Way back in 431 there was a controversy among theologians over the role of Mary in the Catholic Church. They debated: “Who is Mary in God’s plan?” In the end the Bishops declared that Mary really is the mother of Jesus and Jesus is really God. So, it must be said Mary is the Mother of God. The oldest Christian greeting of Mary was proclaimed when her cousin Elizabeth called her *“Mother of my Lord”*. When Elizabeth welcomed Mary, she recognised both the great privilege and Mary’s great faith in accepting it. For centuries, Mary has been praised because she believed. She is Mother of God because of her faith in God. The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, celebrates Mary’s faith and trust in God alone. The Church wants us to imitate her faith.

Our Lady of Peace, Mother of Peace, Our Lady Queen of Peace is a title given to Our Lady where she is represented holding a dove and an olive branch, symbols of peace. In 1482 Pope Sixtus IV commissioned the construction of a Church called Santa Maria della Pace in Rome in thanksgiving for the end of a war involving the Papal States. There are many papal encyclicals asking Mary to intercede for Peace. During the troubled years of World War I, Pope Benedict XV added Our Lady of Peace to the Litany of Loreto. There are many images of Mary Queen of Peace; one of the most famous was treasured for two hundred years by the Capuchin Community in Paris. Today many Parish Churches and Basilicas have been built in honour of Mary with this title.

As we enter a new year, one so troubled across the world, we turn in prayer to Mary, Queen of Peace, asking her to stand with us in our need.

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