

The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1, 2016

With great hope and joy, the church begins this New Year with a celebration of Mary, Mother of Jesus, perfect disciple and model of strength, grace and courage for all believers. In his Christmas Eve homily in 1978, Oscar Romero affirmed the important role of Mary in God's plan of salvation by saying that she is "the human instrument, the daughter of Adam, the daughter of Israel, a people's embodiment, sister of our race. ... The truest homage that a Christian can make to Mary is, like her, to make the effort to incarnate God's life in the fluctuations of our fleeting history."

Wherever she is mentioned in scripture, Mary is represented as a model disciple, that is, as one who hears the word of God and keeps it. The process of hearing God's word and translating it into words and actions requires lifelong effort, and Luke gives us a clue as to how that effort began for Mary. In today's Gospel, the evangelist tells us that "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

Only in time did she begin to fully appreciate the words of the angel messenger as well as those of Simeon, Elizabeth, Joseph, John and even Jesus. Her greatness lies in her willingness to go forward with a plan she didn't understand, to a place she hadn't chosen, for the sake of a people who would reject and torture and kill her son.

By virtue of her position in God's plan of salvation and her willingness to remain open to words and signs and purposes that would only later come to light and fruition, Mary is a gifted guide as we venture into this New Year.

Imitating her and the Son she brought into the world, we can rejoice with Paul from our second reading in the fact that we too are God's children. With Mary, we and all who believe, enter into 2016 with the blessing we heard in our first reading in Numbers to encourage and strengthen us.

And as events unfold, as people come and go in our lives, we will consider each of them in light of the sacred recesses of our souls.

Today's celebration highlights the fact that Mary was first and foremost a woman of complete faith.

What better way to start the New Year than to pray for that kind of real faith. Not faith that demands proofs because that only produces a very weak faith, but faith that God is working His plans in and through us in mysterious ways even if we lack the ability to understand them at the time.

We pray today for the Gift of the Holy Spirit called understanding. The gift of understanding that helps us realize that God is far greater than our intelligence can comprehend. The gift of understanding that leads us to a faith that proclaims along with Mary that the child of Bethlehem is the Son of God.

However, we must not be alarmed at those times when we may have doubts in faith. They are part of human life. The very apostles who witnessed the resurrection of the Lord had doubts of faith even while they stood on the Mountain of the Ascension.

Faith demands our taking a step away from our human perspective and trusting in God to act in ways that are beyond our ability to understand.

Today we pray to Mary, the Mother of God. We ask her to petition her son for us so that we also might keep all these things and reflect on them in our hearts so that we can allow God to act in our lives giving us the courage, the humility, and the faith to follow in her footsteps as authentic, model disciples.