

Homily Notes – The Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

Readings: 1st Num 6:22-27; Gal 4:4-7; Gospel Lk 2:16-21

1. Summary: The Blessed Virgin Mary, as our Mother, and as the Mother of all the Church, desires that we be blessed by God, that is, saved from sin. To do this we must be able to make a good confession and amend our lives (repentance). This is closely related to the making of New Year's resolutions. Here are some practical suggestions for how to successfully change elements in one's life so as to fulfill the will of God.

2. In the first reading, we see that God does wish to bless us. Taken from the book of Numbers, God gives Moses and Aaron the formula they should use while conferring the Divine blessing upon the Israelites: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”*

3. The Responsorial Psalm: “May God bless us in his mercy.”

4. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Galatians that God's Son has become one of us through Mary and that it was through Him that they (we) have become the children of God. What Paul is stressing here is the reality of the human nature of Christ, the Self-humiliation of the Son of God Who deigned to be born of a mother like any human child. She is also the mother of the Church and we are her offspring, hence, brothers and sisters of Jesus (See Rev 12:17, John 19:26).

5. The Revelation passage applies very much to our time. I encourage you to read all of Rev. 12.

“Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.”

That means us. We are at a very dangerous and difficult time in history. We want the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us and she will because we belong to her as her children. She may be the means by which God's blessing will arrive to us. Praying the Rosary is crucial. It is a major weapon in this war.

6. This passage from Revelation illustrates our identity from the point of view of Mary. Mary is the woman. The Devil goes off to wage war against her offspring, which is the Church. How are they identified? As “those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.” This makes very clear that in addition to faith we must also have works, keeping the Commandments.

7. Spiritual Warfare: This also highlights a critical error in discussions concerning the world situation. In watching many, many newscasts concerning the conflict of the “Christian” West with “militant Islam” I very rarely hear any appreciation or evaluation of the role of religion. But we know from these readings that the conflicts we undergo, both personal and at a societal level, have religion at their root. When fighting a spiritual battle, we must use spiritual weapons (See Eph 6:10-20).

8. Today's Gospel describes how the shepherds spread to all their neighbors the Good News surrounding the birth of Jesus, which the angel had revealed to them. Further, Luke tells us how Mary treasured, “all these things” in her heart. The Gospel also recounts that on the day of His Circumcision, the Child was given the name Jesus that was chosen by God himself. The name itself means “Savior.”

9. Traditional Belief: Today's feast answers the question, “Why do Catholics honor Mary?” Non-Christians sometimes believe that we Catholics worship Mary as a goddess who gave birth to our God. Non-Catholic Christians argue that there is no Biblical basis for honoring Mary and that Catholics worship her and make her equal to God. They fail to understand why we honor Mary and name Churches and institutions after her. They do not understand what we mean by calling her the Mother of God (CCC 148, 495). The truth is that we Catholics do not worship Mary as we worship, adore, God. We should honor her, respect her, love her and seek her intercession, praying, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.” We do not, ever, equate her with God nor replace God with her. Rather, we honor her, primarily because God honored her by choosing her to become the Mother of Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, when He took on our flesh and became Man. Furthermore, Mary always leads us to Jesus.

10. Biblical basis: Scripture clearly identifies Mary as the “Mother of God.” From St. Luke's Gospel, in the message given by the angel to Mary we learn: *“You are going to be the mother of a Son and you will call Him*

Jesus, and He will be called the Son of the Most High." Once she said yes, the Holy Spirit created in her womb the human nature that God the Son would assume. Then she is rightly called the Mother of God. Furthermore, after the angel had appeared to her and she visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth said, "*Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me?*" [Lk 1:43]. So the Bible teaches that Mary was the mother of the God-Man Jesus, not in the sense that she gave birth to Jesus as God, but in the sense that the Baby she bore had the nature of God and the nature of Man.

11. The need for good, spiritual resolutions for the coming year. Going back to the reading in Revelation, if we are identified as those who obey the Commandments as well as believe in Jesus, we have a problem since we know that we sin and from time to time may break the commandments. That means we need the Sacrament of Reconciliation and we need to know how to be effective in our change of life (repentance). The Blessed Virgin Mary is our mother and desires the blessings of God and his forgiveness for each of us. Until we actually find our lives changed, we will still suffer the bad effects of our sins, even if they have been forgiven. This is a good object for New Year's Resolutions.

12. Thinking at a spiritual level. Many ideas for making our changes of life effective on the internet had to do with losing weight and dieting. But let us turn our hearts to our spiritual condition and identify what spiritual changes we need to make in our lives. Then we have some suggestions for making these changes effective.

13. Actually changing. In the Act of Contrition we promise to God to 1) confess our sins, 2) do our penance, 3) amend our lives, 4) avoid the near occasions of sin, and 5) sin no more. To accomplish the last three, we need to be able to make **resolutions** and carry them out successfully, which in many instances is very difficult. Here are some suggestions for success.

14. Practical Suggestions for really making changes in our lives. The Blessed Virgin Mary has appeared and is asking for two basic things, that we pray the Rosary, especially as families, and that we have a regular schedule for Confession involving our Repentance. Hence we need New Year's Resolutions that will help ourselves, our family, and the world. And we have assistance from Jesus and from His Mother to help us accomplish this. Make a commitment this year to pray the Rosary personally or as a family daily.

15. For change, identify something objectively important, not just something we have a feeling about. That is, know clearly that the behavior is sinful, that it is unhealthy, that some authority or source has identified it as such and that you really must change.

1. **Accountability.** Tell the world about it, at least a good friend or your confessor. Write it down, in detail.
2. **Don't overload. Keep it real.** Choose only one or two items to work on for a definite time. Set reasonable goals and have a plan to make it work.
3. **Be specific.** The change must be measurable, in some units or attitudes so you know when you have achieved it.
4. **Have a plan.** Break the overall goal down into achievable steps.
Ex. Dave Ramsey's way of attacking debt (the debt snowball).
5. **Tell the world.** It's harder to excuse oneself when you have told all your friends your plan to change. Get an accountability buddy.
6. **Find alternative things to fill up the void.** See Matt 12:43 ff. Story of demon who brings back seven others to a clean but empty house.
7. **Reward yourself (and others should reward you and praise you, too).**

16. God wishes to bless us. God promises change and transformation in forgiveness. 1 John 1:9. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. Remember that God really does wish to bless us.

17. Take time to reflect carefully about your spiritual situation and the challenges facing you. Then involve our Lady in prayer. Commit yourself and your family to the daily Rosary and a regular practice of confession. Do this and you will be amazed at what support the Lord will reveal to you and what may happen in your life.