

HOMILY for the FEAST OF MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD or, THEOTOKOS – Year ABC

Every year, St. Peter conducted a tour down on earth. “This year,” he told the Virgin Mary, “I’m going to survey all your shrines and compare them to the shrines I’ve seen in previous years.” He took his tour & visited shrines around the world before he came back to heaven & reported to Mary, “I’ve got great news! There are more people at your shrines than anyone else’s. But, I noticed one thing – every single statue portrayed you with a sad expression on your face. Why is that?”

And Mary said, “You might not understand my feelings. That’s why.”

Then, St. Peter said, “Now, Mary, I’ve had many people tell me their innermost feelings – can’t you open up to me?”

And Mary said, “Well, you see, Peter... I really wanted a girl!”

Anyway, as you might know, today the Church celebrates the Feast of Mary the Mother of God or, Theotokos as we usher in the New Year 2023. Before we discuss the spiritual lessons of this feast, let me share with you its history & how it has got here.

Evidently, the Coptic Church (around Egypt & Middle Eastern region) celebrates this feast on Jan 16. In the West, this feast is celebrated on Sunday before Christmas. For example, in Spain, it’s being carried out on Dec 18, in Portugal Oct 11, or in France Jan 18. Meanwhile, in the East, the Church honors the secondary person like Mary on the day after the Feast of the principal person, i.e. Jesus. In fact, the Byzantine Church (around the current country Turkey) celebrates this feast on Dec 26. However, in Rome, the Church has used the octave day of Christmas to honor the maternity of Mary. It has also assigned the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus to the first Sunday of Jan. Then in 431, the Council of Ephesus asked the Latin Church to remember the maternity of Mary; & its intention was completely carried out in 1931. This Council & the Latin Church inserted this feast in the Apostles’ Creed that we proclaim every Sunday & Holy Day as following, “...Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit & born of the Virgin Mary.” In other words, Mary is the mother of the whole Jesus: human & divine. Furthermore, the Church has added another reason to remember in today’s feast as Pope Paul VI asked everyone to pray for peace on Jan 1 in his encyclical *Marialis Cultus* published in 1974. The Feast of the Mary the Mother of God officially includes the New Year celebration which was dedicated to the pagan god of Janus on Jan 1. That is the quick summary of the history of the feast of Mary the Mother of God or Theotokos.

Now, let’s take a look at some of the spiritual lessons that this feast would bring us. First of all, if Mary is the Mother of the human and divine Jesus, then we’re brothers & sisters of the human Jesus and also the children of God. We have taken for granted phrases like “brothers & sisters in Christ” & “children of God.” But, we do not know how they have come to be. Today’s feast helps make sense out of those phrases for us. The reason you & I have become brothers & sisters in Christ is because He has entered our world through Mary & chosen us to be his human brothers & sisters. With Jesus as our human brother & Mary as His mother, we all have Mary as our mother. Moreover, since Jesus is also the Son of God, we naturally become the children of God. Hopefully, that helps us see how the phrases like “brothers & sisters in Christ” & “children of God” have come about. In case we want to learn more about that explanation, today’s Second Reading has this message to tell us, “...The proof that you are sons & daughters is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit of his Son which cries out ‘Abba!’

(‘Father!’). You are no longer a slave but a son or a daughter! And the fact that you are a son or a daughter makes you an heir or an heiress by God’s design.” So, as children of God, we have become heirs or heiresses of the Kingdom of God. That is the reward waiting for us after this life. The fact that Mary agreed to be the mother of Jesus has helped us trade up our spiritual status & find a lot more blessings through Him.

Secondly, we’ve taken for granted that Jesus has two natures: human & divine. But, for years people have struggled to see Jesus’ divine nature in spite of countless miracles that He did & the four Gospels recorded for us. In fact, many people continue to discredit Jesus’ divine nature & claim that He is simply an eloquent speaker or a wonderful prophet. Today’s feast is a good confirmation & reminder for us about Jesus’ true identity. He might look like us, but his origin is really from Heaven. We humans might have wished to meet God since the beginning of Creation. But, until the incarnation of Jesus, we do not know how God looks like. Now we look at Jesus & can see the image of God. Hopefully the divine nature of Jesus will help us desire to be with God in heaven after this life.

Thirdly, this feast helps us see God’s love for us in the maternal figure of Mary. We humans have often associated the unconditional & undying love for someone with the love between a mother & her child. That special love has been written in stories, poetry, songs, & literature. The Bible also talks a lot about God’s love for us. But now, for the first time, we can see that love with our own eyes in the maternal love of Mary for her son Jesus. When we see the love that Mary has for her son Jesus, we know how much God loves us. Of course, that love would be fully revealed to us on the Cross when Jesus offers His own life for us.

Finally, the Church asks us to pray for peace at the beginning of the New Year as we celebrate this feast. Hence, Mary is often referred to as the Queen of Peace. Our world sure needs peace in the home & heart of each person, on the streets, at work & public gatherings, between two nations, & in many other places. For we have heard many agitating speeches & seen lots of violent acts pop up all over the place in our world. That is why we all dream to leave this tumultuous world & be in Heaven to acquire a peaceful life. So, let’s pray that Mary can help us find peace even in this life for ourselves & our world.

My dear brothers & sisters, the feast of Mary the Mother of God or Theotokos tells us not only about the true identity of Jesus but also about who we really are. Through Mary & her son Jesus, we have become children of God & brothers & sisters in Christ. Hopefully we will act like them & try to bring God’s love & peace to the world in this New Year regardless of how we might be influenced or treated. For now, let me leave with you this blessing in today’s First Reading as we begin the New Year 2023: “[May] the Lord bless you & keep you! [May] the Lord let His face shine upon you, & be gracious to you! And [may] the Lord look upon you kindly & give you peace!”