

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God



Today's solemnity, Mary Mother of God, puts a deep theological focus on the Christmas celebration. Going back to our dogmatic theology, the study of the truths of the faith, we focus in on whom this Jesus is. By asking the who question, as distinguished from the what question, we are looking to the person of the Lord. If I asked you, what are you, you would respond: an American, a human being, a Buc fan, or something like that. If I asked you, who are you, you would respond, "I'm Fred Jones, the son of Bill and Martha Jones. If we asked Jesus "What are you" the response would be that he is both divine and human, God and man. If we ask him, "Who are you?" his response would be in the order of, "I am the Eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who took on humanity on Christmas Day. Today's feast, Mary Mother of God, emphasizes the person, the who of Jesus. When we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God" we are not suggesting that Mary is a goddess that gave birth to a god. She did not create divinity within her, but she did give birth to a child who was for all eternity the Eternal Word of God. Many artists of past centuries depicted Mary nursing the Baby Jesus. What the artists are saying is that Mary was the mother of the Lord in all ways, nurturing him during his infancy with her body.

What the artists are also saying is that just as Mary nurtured Jesus, so she cares for and nurtures all the children entrusted to her by her son. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners". There is another ancient depiction of Mary that could illicit the scorn of the so called intelligentsia if they just stayed on the fringe level of the paintings. Many of the Medieval and Renaissance Masters depicted the Annunciation. Some showed the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit as rays of light enveloping Mary. Many showed this overshadowing as rays of light entering into Mary through one of her ears. This is not a Puritanic avoidance of sexuality. Certainly the Medieval and Renaissance Masters were not concerned with that. Nor is this a childish understanding of how Mary became pregnant, on the same terms of a child coming from the stork. It is a lot deeper than this, profound in fact. What this is saying is that the Eternal Word of God was heard by Mary and given sanctuary within her. St. Augustine put it this way, he said, "Mary, full of grace, first conceived Jesus in her heart before she conceived him in her womb.

There is a power to faith, a primacy of faith, that manifests itself in the physical world. Saturated with the Word of God, the person of faith naturally gives birth to the presence of Christ in the world. I am not just speaking about Mary, Mother of God. I am speaking about us, you and me, Christians, people who make the Word of God present in the world by allowing ourselves to be overshadowed with his presence. Faith is not a matter of dogmas, nor is it a purely spiritual entity hidden from the world. Faith is the integration of the spiritual and physical, the invisible and visible dimensions of a human person. Faith makes God present in the world. Many times people will speak about a meeting with the Holy Father, or with a deeply and truly spiritual person and say, "I felt that I was in the presence of God". They were. And we are. People of true and deep faith make God present in our parish, our community, our country and our world.

People of deep, true faith, are at peace, not because they are withdrawn from the world, but because they have the power to withstand the force of the world that would try to devastate them. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners". We are sinners because so often we refuse to allow the Word to become Flesh within our lives. And because we are sinners, we are often in turmoil, for sin is turmoil, chaos. But, if we allow the grace of God to work in us and through us, if we allow his word to take flesh, then we can live in peace. We can be people of peace. Blessed Pope Paul VI gave permission for this feast to be either Mary Mother of God or the World Day of Prayers for Peace. For years, I have asked myself, "Why can't the Church make up its mind?" Now, I am beginning to realize that the two celebrations are really integral to each other. To be Mother of God, is to be a carrier of the Prince of Peace. To ensure peace in the world, we have to, like Mary, "Hear the Word of God and treasure it". "Pray for us sinners, holy Mother of God.? Help us to live up to our capability of making the Eternal Word present in the world. Pray for us to your son. Ask Him for the grace that we might be so permeated with the spiritual that we might make the spiritual physical. Help us to live the Life of Christ. Help us to be People of Peace.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ