

## **Feast of Mary, Mother of God**

Cycle A, 1.1.17

Numbers 6:22-27/Galatians 4:4-7/

Luke 2:16-21

### **LOOKING BACK IN GRATITUDE; LOOKING AHEAD WITH TRUST**

We share our prayer together only a few hours after festive fireworks over the San Francisco Bay and noisy revelers throughout the world ushered in a New Year. The first month of the year –January-- according to some ancient accounts, is named after the Roman god Janus. Janus is the god of doors and gates, entrances and passages, beginnings and endings. The image of Janus found in Roman ruins is depicted as having two faces, one that looks forward to the future and one that looks backward to the past.



What a perfect image for New Years Day. A lot of the online articles I've been reading the past few days do exactly that: like the image of the god Janus, one side looking back to what has been, but the other side looking ahead to what will be. An article looking back to the "10 best movies of 2016"; the most amazing photos taken in the past year. Or, projecting ahead: "major weather patterns to anticipate in 2017;" "looking

ahead to 2017 and the role Russia will play..." We could each do the same from our own personal perspective. Spend some quiet time today looking back at your iPhone calendar or the calendar on your kitchen wall – however you've kept the days, weeks and months of the past year. Trace the ups and downs that have marked 2016 -- giving thanks for the blessings and graces which were there in abundance, receiving forgiveness for the times you've missed the mark, and acknowledging the strength you've gained from the struggles that came your way which tested your faith and your resolve.



Then take time to look ahead to 2017. What major events are you anticipating in your own life or in your family? What dreams and hopes do you hold in your heart? What personal changes do you want to make? What difficulties and challenges do you anticipate? What divine grace do you need to face them? What can you do in the coming year to bring peace to our anxious world? to help end discrimination, violence, harsh judgment and poverty? How will you and I be messengers of God's love to others in 2017?

It's usually easier to look behind from where we've come than to look ahead to an uncertain and unknowable future. In his book *Anam Cara*, a Celtic

term that means “soul friend”, Irish poet and philosopher, John O’Donohue, offers an image of looking ahead. O’Donohue writes:

*As a child, when I looked up at the mountain of my village, I used to dream of the day when I would be old enough to go with my uncle up to the top of the mountain. I thought that I would be able to see the whole world on the horizon. I remember that I was very excited when the day finally came. My uncle was bringing the sheep over the mountain and he told me that I could come with him. As we climbed the mountain and came to where I thought the horizon would be, it had disappeared. Not only was I not able to see everything when I got there, but another horizon was waiting, farther on. I was disappointed, but also excited in an unfamiliar way. Each new level revealed a new world.*

As a new year opens for us a new world, with all its uncertainty and all its promise, today’s scriptures offer us the example of Mary as a model and inspiration. In the face of all that was happening she had to be asking herself: “What does all this mean?” “How will I cope?” In her heart, Mary’s ultimate answer to these questions was singular: Trust. Trust in the God in whom she fully believed.

Abiding in such trust, Mary became the ultimate disciple, the epitome of what it means to follow Jesus. She is the one who surrendered her ego, who quieted her fears, who made the decision to trust – even though she had little knowledge of what was going on. In her wildest dreams, this poor, humble woman could never have imagined how significant her “yes” would be in human history. In the language of New Year’s celebrations,

Mary made a resolution – the resolution to open her heart to the amazing, enlivening fullness of grace; the resolution to voice a wholehearted “Yes.”



In today’s Gospel, Luke invites us to do the same -- to make our hearts like Mary’s: to resolve to notice the angels that appear in our lives, the many people whose love and support sustains us; to resolve to welcome the shepherds of today – the poorest of the poor, the ones who depend on us for food, shelter and clothing; to resolve to open our hearts to new possibilities, new beginnings, new dreams – for yourself, your family, for our parish. On this first day of the New Year, let’s resolve to make the heart of Mary our own. Let’s promise ourselves that we will clean out a room in our hearts so there will always be space for God to be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of our love and our trust – a space within us in which the child Jesus can be re-born.

I’d like to close with words from the poet Rainer Marie Rilke. To me they speak of an assurance of God’s presence with us throughout the coming year, an encouragement to trust God in all situations and experiences, and a reminder of the baptismal vocation to which each of us has been called – to be reflections of Christ each day -- to be alive in his Spirit:

God speaks to each of us  
as he makes us,  
then walks with us silently  
out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

*You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.*

*Embody me.*

*Flare up like a flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.*

*Let everything happen to you:  
beauty and terror.*

*Just keep going. No feeling is final.*

*Don't let yourself lose me.*

*Nearby is the country they call life.*

*You will know it by its seriousness.*

*Give me your hand.*



*Happy New Year!*  
*Fr. John Kasper, OFS*