

January 1, 2009 – Mary, Mother of God

I remember when I was growing up, I constantly said to myself, “Oh, I do NOT want to grow up to be like my dad!” But, at some point, he started jumping out of my mouth. After all, it’s from our parents that we learn – we pick up their mannerisms, their manors of speech, all kinds of things. It’s why the Church recognizes that “parents are the primary teachers of their children in the ways of faith.” It’s why we assign such an important role to the parents of our CCD students – because THEY are the ones who, by their example and witness, show their children the importance of the Faith. We learn EVERYTHING about being a human being from our parents.

In today’s 2nd reading, St. Paul reminds us that through God’s grace, we have all become brothers & sisters of Christ – and so, children of God. This happened at Baptism, when we were “born again” and God filled us with His life and adopted us as His children.

Now, just like our parents always wanted us to grow up to be wise and mature and successful in life, so God wants us to be wise and mature and fruitful in our spiritual lives.

Today’s Solemnity, Mary, the Mother of God, reminds us that if we are children of God, we are ALSO spiritual children of Mary. Just like mom teaches us to become good human beings, so Mary helps us to become mature Christians. It is Mary who teaches us every virtue and every good needed to lead us into happiness, both here on earth AND in eternal life in heaven. Mary is our model, our example, our guide – she is our Mother!

How did Mary live her life as Christ’s disciple? St. Luke tells us in the Gospel today, “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” Everything that happened in her life became a moment to reflect on where God was acting and what God was doing – not that she always had all the answers (how could she understand her Son’s death as she stood at the foot of the cross?), but she was always able to put everything that happened into some context in God’s Divine Plan for her life. Reflecting on things in our heart is a sign – and a source – of wisdom.

There is our perfect example! Reflecting on the daily events of life will become the source of our wisdom – and will be the sign of our wisdom. You want to become a mature, wise and successful Christian? You can’t do it UNLESS you develop this ability to reflect on everything that happens in life.

Mary not only shows us HOW to do this by her example, but she comes to our aid to HELP us.

Think about your life – think about those “dark” areas of your life where there is sin and temptation. Certainly in those moments and places we are NOT reflecting on God, are we? Rather, we’ve become distracted and self-focused. We’ve turned FROM God and turned TOWARD ourselves. Here is where Mary, our Mother, comes to our aid.

Recently, one of my priest friends shared with me a personal experience he had where Mary really intervened in his life: (BTW, the names have been changed to protect the innocent.)

Fr. Martin shared with me a personal struggle he was having. It was a temptation that, in many ways, had really haunted him for many years, and he was feeling totally unable to overcome the struggle. One night, in a dream, he saw the root of this moral struggle. There was a small demon, ugly and nasty, standing in front of him – reaching out to him with his mangled, hands – claws at the end of his fingers. He was cackling and laughing that he had enslaved Fr. Martin. Fr. Martin, in his dream, started to call out to God – and cried out to Mary, asking her to come to his aid. Suddenly, the most beautiful woman appeared, brilliant and radiant. She calmly walked toward them – and the demon began to cower and scream, “NO! Get away from me.” She walked directly up to the demon, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and picked him up as if he were a small bag of feathers. She tossed the demon over her shoulder as he screamed in pain and terror – and he was gone. Mary then just smiled peacefully at Fr. Martin – and he realized how to overcome his personal struggle.

You see, Mary not only shows us, by example, HOW to reflect on God and keep God the focus of our lives, but when we’ve become distracted by a sin or temptation or even a defect or disorder in our lives, Mary HELPS us to overcome – by offering us her Motherly love and care – and leading us to her Son.

Today, as the new year dawns, our culture has the tradition of making resolutions – things that we want to do differently or things we want to do better in the new year. Besides the typical resolutions to lose weight or stop smoking or exercise more, let’s make one more resolution to improve our spiritual lives – and in particular, to learn from our Blessed Mother how to reflect on things in our hearts – and when we’re not doing that – to call on her for her powerful intervention and intercession.

Devotion to Mary as our Mother is an integral part of our lives as Christians. There are many things we can do to learn from her and ask her aid in our daily lives, and maybe these could be our New Years Resolutions this year:

- ? Do you make a morning offering? The Church has a wonderful tradition of dedicating each day, even before we get out of bed, to Mary – “Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer to you all my thoughts, words and actions, by soul and body, to your greater glory and honor, the love of Jesus and the salvation of my soul. Use me today, Mary.” This is the one I use every day. Think about it – if we’ve dedicated our day to Mary and to Christ, when we think about doing something evil – we remember that we’ve dedicated all our thoughts and actions to God – perhaps we’ll “re-think” things, perhaps Mary will come to our aid.
- ? The Church has a beautiful devotion: the rosary. Purely from Scripture (the Our Father and Hail Mary) and words Mary spoke when she appeared at Fatima. Each decade

focusing on a mystery of Christ's life – the Annunciation and Nativity, the Baptism of the Lord, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Crowning with thorns, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension... It all focuses on Christ and His action and power – even in raising Mary, body & soul into heaven. It's Christ's work – not her's.

- ? The Rosary and focusing on the mysteries of Christ help us to “reflect in our hearts” on all that Christ has done. The Rosary is the 100% effective prayer. We probably all know the rosary – but we don't all use it! It can seem overwhelming – who has 15-20 minutes every day to pray the 5-decade group of mysteries assigned for the day? But, maybe Pope Benedict can give us an example of how to do this: In one of his recent books, “*Salt and Light*” he wrote that he prays only one decade at a time – rather than the whole thing all at once. Maybe we could all manage to pray one in the morning, one in the car going to work, one at lunch, one coming home, one at bedtime... something like that.
- ? Do you have images of Mary in your home? For example, this icon of Mary, placed in the home, can be a constant reminder that Mary is not only the Mother of God, but also OUR mother. Maybe, looking at her picture every day, we can say to her, at least in our hearts: *My Mother*, and feel and KNOW that she is protecting us and encouraging us to begin this New Year that God has given us.

Maybe, in this new year, we can make the resolution that we'll open our lives to Mary – that we'll follow her example of “reflecting on all these things in our hearts.” Then, when life throws us trials and burdens, we can turn to her and rely on her aid to see things with a mature wisdom and fruitful reflection – knowing that, for those who love God and place their hope in Mary's aid, all things work for the good.

Mary stood at the foot of the cross – wondering how this could be part of God's plan – only to experience the resurrection and the fullness of God's Plan. Let's imitate Mary this year, let's trust in her help, let's call on her aid – and reflect on all that happens in the depths of our heart – knowing that, with Mary as our Mother, we are well looked after and that we are being given all the help from Heaven that we need to become mature, wise and fruitful Christians in this new year.