

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Octave Day of Christmas, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Jan. 1, 2021, Cycle B

Thus we come to the Octave or Eighth Day of Christmas. With great hope and genuine joy, the Church begins the New Civil Year with a celebration of the mystery of Mary's motherhood of the Word made Flesh in the Christmas Miracle. This day we also honor Mary as proto – (first) – disciple and model of strength, grace, and courage for all believers. The Gospel of Luke tells us: "And Mary kept all of these things, reflecting on them in her heart." As followers of the Lord Jesus, we would all do well to imitate Mary in reflecting on and praying over the Christmas mysteries in our hearts.

In his Christmas Eve homily in 1978, Salvadorian Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was martyred for the faith, affirmed the important role of Mary in God's plan of salvation. Archbishop Romero said: Mary is "the human instrument, the daughter of Adam, the daughter of Israel, a people's embodiment, sister of our race..., the truest homage that a Christian can make to Mary is, like her, to make the effort to incarnate God's life in the fluctuations of our history." Archbishop Romero says it well: we honor Mary by imitating her and saying "yes" to bearing God into the world in our daily lives. Mary is the model on how to be a true disciple of Jesus.

For close to 5 centuries, until the council of Ephesus in 431 AD, Christians argued amongst themselves over whether or not Mary should be given the title Mother of God "Theotokos" (God's bearer) in Greek. After all, Mary was not the mother of Jesus' divine nature, she was, mother of Jesus only in his human nature. Jesus' divinity comes from God the Father.

However, the church feared that if we didn't honor Mary with the title "Theotokos" – Mother of God, people might get the wrong impression and conclude that Jesus either was not divine from the moment of his human conception or not even divine at all. So at the Council of Ephesus the council fathers decided that the church would honor Mary with the title Theotokos, God bearer – Mother of God, since Jesus, the Church believed, was divine from before he was conceived in Mary's womb.

What are we to make of - the mystery of Mary's motherhood of God in his human nature? Well, as I indicated, we should take our cue from Mary herself – what we just heard from the Christmas story of the Gospel of Luke.

Marveling at all the events surrounding Jesus' birth, and especially the visit by the shepherds, we are told that "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

We need to reflect on Mary's motherhood of God in our hearts. As the Christmas celebration unfolds, moving towards Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord, we need time to spend in prayer with each mystery of Christmas, and ask what God is asking of me – of us. What does it mean that God in Jesus became human, and what is my role in all of this?

God asked Mary to be Theotokos – "to bear and enflesh God into the world." Mary said "Yes." When we ponder and pray about, and reflect on the mystery of Mary's motherhood of God – is not God asking us, as followers of Jesus, to be in some ways bearers of God into the world too!? Is not the incarnation of God in Jesus continually made real in our world through our yeses to God's Will? Archbishop Oscar Romero, again, says the truest homage we can give Mary is to imitate her. That is to be bearers of God into the world.

As we enter upon a new civil year, let us resolve then to imitate Mary's example, and say Yes to God's Will that we continue to mother the presence of God into the World. Through us may the New Year be filled with God's Love, Grace, and Life.