

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

[Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:15-21]

Excerpts from Benedict XVI – 2013

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Brothers and sisters, in every person the desire for peace is an essential goal which coincides in a certain way with the desire for a full, happy and successful human life. In other words, the desire for peace corresponds to God's plan for humankind. Humanity is made for the peace which is God's gift. Peace is both a messianic gift and the fruit of human effort ... It is peace with God through a life lived according to his will. It is interior peace with oneself, and exterior peace with our neighbours and all creation". Peace is the supreme good to ask as a gift from God and, at the same time, that which is to be built with our every effort.

How can we experience that peace within ourselves, in spite of problems, darkness and anxieties? The Gospel of Luke focuses on the interior peace of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. During the days in which "she gave birth to her first-born son" (Lk 2:7), many unexpected things occurred. Not only the birth of the Son but, even before, the tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, not finding room at the inn, and the unexpected visit of the shepherds. In all this, however, Mary remains even calmed, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself. In silence she considers what happens, keeping it in her mind and heart, and pondering it calmly and peacefully.

This is the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes turbulent and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which agitate us. The Gospel passage finishes with a mention of the circumcision of Jesus. According to the Law of Moses, eight days after birth, baby boys were to be circumcised and then given their name. Through his messenger, God himself had said to Mary – as well as to Joseph – that the Name to be given to the child was "Jesus"; and so it came to be. The Name which God had already chosen, even before the child had been conceived, is now officially given to him at the moment of circumcision.

This also changes Mary's identity once and for all: she becomes "the mother of Jesus", that is the mother of the Saviour, of Christ, of the Lord. Jesus is not a man like any other, but the Word of God, one of the Divine Persons, the Son of God: therefore the Church has given Mary the title *Theotokos* or Mother of God.

The first reading reminds us that peace is a gift from God and is linked to the splendour of the face of God, according to the text from the Book of Numbers, which hands down the blessing used by the priests of the People of Israel in their liturgical assemblies.

This blessing repeats three times the Holy Name of God, a Name not to be spoken, and each time it is linked to two words indicating an action in favour of man. “The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you: the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace”. So peace is the summit of these six actions of God in our favour, in which he turns towards us the splendour of his face. For sacred Scripture, contemplating the face of God is the greatest happiness: “You gladden him with the joy of your face” (*Ps* 21:7). From the contemplation of the face of God are born joy, security and peace.

But what does it mean concretely to contemplate the face of the Lord, as understood in the New Testament? It means knowing him directly, in so far as is possible in this life, through Jesus Christ in whom he is revealed. To rejoice in the splendour of God’s face means penetrating the mystery of his Name made known to us in Jesus, understanding something of his interior life and of his will, so that we can live according to his plan of love for humanity. God’s Son made man has let us know the Father, he has let us know the hidden face of the Father through his visible human face.

Brothers and sisters, this is the foundation of our peace: the certainty of contemplating in Jesus Christ the splendour of the face of God the Father. The splendour of the face of God, shining upon us and granting us peace, is the manifestation of his fatherhood. The Lord turns his face to us, he reveals himself as our Father and grants us peace. Nothing can take this peace from believers, not even the difficulties and sufferings of life. Indeed, sufferings, trials and darkness do not undermine but build up our hope, a hope which does not deceive.

May the Virgin Mary, whom today we venerate with the title of Mother of God, help us to contemplate the face of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May she sustain us and accompany us in this New Year: and may she obtain for us and for the whole world the gift of peace. Amen.