

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

31 December-January 1, 2014/ Cathedral 5:15 pm, 10:00 a.m., 12:00 Noon

Readings: Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2: 16-21

I came across a very interesting poem recently written back in the 5th century by a man named Sedulius, the same man who composed the text of the beautiful *Introuit* you heard sung at the beginning of Mass. He drew upon the biblical comparison between Adam and Christ and Eve and Mary in one of his works. He wrote:

Because of one man, all his descendants perished;
And all are saved because of one man.
Because of one woman, the deadly door opened;
And life returned, because of one woman.¹

If you had asked me about the “deadly door” before having read the poem, I’d point to the upper Selby Ave. door each time a gust of cold air rushes through—those who sit up front know exactly what I mean! Here it means something quite different— from Eve, we received only darkness and captivity, while from the Virgin, we were offered a world in which we might find salvation. Mary is thus said to be, among her hundreds of titles, “gate of heaven,” and “portal of eternal mercy”— indeed the deadly door has been opened.

A few weeks ago we celebrated the Immaculate Conception, situating Mary’s very beginning as blessed and graced. As we close the Octave of Christmas, we celebrate the divine motherhood of Mary, a solemn dogma, a belief in faith that in giving birth to our Redeemer, she is rightly called the Mother of God.

¹ Caelius Sedulius, *Elegia*, 5-8; *PL* 19, 753 *Unius ob meritum cuncti perire minores, salvantur cuncti unius ob meritum. Sola fuit mulier, patuit qua ianua letho: et qua vita redit, sola fuit mulier.*

Sacred Scripture itself tells us of the dignity of Mary, but not by primarily recounting the facts of her physical motherhood, though it certainly includes these. The focus instead is on what Mary did. Saint Luke envisages the greatness of Mary by showing her to be blessed among women. Her consent takes place through a free, personal, grace-filled and inspired act of faith. Several centuries later Saint Augustine would write: “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ.”²

She is situated along the line of the Old Testament patriarchs, who made their own free decisions to accept God’s will, thus paving the way for salvation history. In Mary and through Mary, the new and definitive covenant is made possible.³ The Blessed Virgin’s decision to accept God’s invitation through an angel made possible our Savior’s birth. Because of this, and as a consequence of the unity of person in Christ within two natures, Mary is rightly called Mother of God. The Scriptural witness focused not so much on the how, nor on the particulars, but on her simple and unreserved acceptance of God’s plan, within the context of human history. Today’s feast is about our salvation.

The incarnation of the Word is the absolute pinnacle of salvation history, for God so loved the world that he gave us His only Son in the fullness of time, born of a woman. Saint Paul articulates this in our second reading today, calling each of us as adoptive sons. That we are no longer slaves to the Law is due to the coming into our world of a Savior, one who does not enter our lives in a manner completely extraneous to us.

Rather he transforms the world by entering into the very depths of humanity, becoming one with us in all things but sin. There are really

² “Beatior ergo Maria percipiendo fidem Christi quam concipiendo carnem Christi.” *De virg.* 3.3

³ Rev. Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, 1963 pp. 53-62.

only two possibilities—either God stands infinitely distant from His world, or He draws His creation ever closer to Himself and into His divine life. The Solemnity of Mary helps us to discover why He chose the latter possibility. For this to occur, it was fitting that He should be born of a woman, becoming a real part of our world.

Today's feast recalls that this happened because a maiden knelt down at the appearance of God's messenger and responded with the unconditional gift of herself, saying "Be it done to me according to your Word."

As we begin a new calendar year, how appropriate that we begin by opening ourselves to God's plan for our lives. The Church gives us a model, and we mark Sacred Time, not by the dropping of a ball in Times Square, but by the chief events of our salvation history. We begin the Year of the Lord 2014 recognizing that this year, like all previous to it, belongs to Him. He is the Lord of all time.

We would do well to emulate the example of our Blessed Mother in treasuring all things in our hearts, entrusting this upcoming year to her intercession and protection. Because she believed, we have been blessed. Because she gave a definitive "Yes," another year of grace is made possible for us who remain. She received in her Blessed womb the Savior of the World, opening the way for our salvation. Through her intercession, may our salvation be brought to its fulfillment. Amen.