

Today's solemnity is a most consequential one for the Church, though having less to do with it being the beginning of a calendar year. Our reading from Galatians reminds us: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

We pause to ask God's blessing on the new year, and deign to ask for Mary's maternal intercession. This is appropriate. It is equally important that we honor Mary, Holy Mother of God, first among women, is appropriately honored on the first day of the new year of Our Lord 2019.

The oldest-known Marian prayer originates about 70 miles from Cairo, Egypt.¹ Composed in Greek, it has come down to us in the West in its Latin version *Sub Tuum Presidium*, "Under Your Protection." In a mid-3rd century fragment preserved in a library in England, the term *Theotokos* is readily discernible."² This word, translated as "mother of God" is a title well-known to Catholics. And let us be clear- it is no medieval invention.

It is also significant that the text is dated to the mid-3rd century, because that was a time of horrific persecution under the Emperor Decius and so we can see that Christians were fleeing to the protection of Mary in time of difficulty. When all is said and done, we are not so different from them, are we? We are called to do the same.

Other writings of the same era also include use of this word, fully two centuries before the term was dogmatically defined by the Council of Ephesus in answer to the heresy of Nestorius, who had denied that Mary was the mother of God.

Prayer often precedes doctrine in the sense that prayers spring up from the community, and doctrine is reflective of believe. The law of prayer is

¹ The Oxyrhynchus papyri, are a group of manuscripts discovered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discovered in the vicinity of the ancient Egyptian city of the same name.

² John Rylands Library, Manchester England

the law of belief.³

So why is it important to call Mary the “Mother of God”? One early theologian surmised: “...unless the Savior’s birth had been heavenly and blessed, unless it had had something of the divine that surpassed human nature, his teaching would never had spread to the whole world.”⁴ Indeed, this birth had “something of the Divine” as God had decreed.

To those who said: “Let no one call Mary Theotocos: for Mary was but a woman; and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman,” the Church answered definitively that they were in error. Historians from the early Church noted how people were troubled in their faith by those who denied Mary’s divine motherhood: “These words created a great sensation, and troubled many both of the clergy and laity; they having been heretofore taught to acknowledge Christ as God, and by no means to separate his humanity from his divinity...”⁵

Mary’s exalted place in salvation history was carried out in humility and in absolute conformity with the will of God. Today, we turn our gaze towards Mary, not just as mother, but as our mother too. In calling her Mother of God, it is more than a theological assertion. It connotes a relationship and one that Jesus would desire for us too.

Blessed is she among women. Jesus entrusted Mary to St. John at the foot of the Cross, and in doing so, he was effectively entrusting her to humanity, including you and me. We are invited into this relationship. It is the Mother of God who has cooperated to make possible our joy, our hope and our redemption by means of her unequivocal “Yes” to God. Indeed, she leads us down the good path, the path to holiness and purity, the path of acceptance of God’s will in our lives, not counting the cost of

³ In the years between the Church’s third and fourth ecumenical councils that the Church’s liturgy began to include a commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Eucharistic prayer (cf. Rev. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*: trans. from the original Italian by Ignatius Press, pub. 1999, p. 282)

⁴ Origen, Homilies of the Gospel of St. Luke, (*Hom. VII,6*) Found in “The Fathers of the Church: Origen, Homilies on Luke,” translated by Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., CUA Press, 1996, page 31.

⁵ Socrates, History of the Church, 7, 32.

discipleship.

Do we flee to Mary's protection in our own day? Do we see her as one to whom we bring our troubles and worries? Recall, Mary not only bore Jesus on Christmas morning, but her tender gaze remained fixed upon our Lord throughout his infancy and childhood, ever striving to be a loving mother according to her humble vocation.

Let us commit ourselves in 2019 to being witnesses to the world of the manifold gift of a Savior, brought forth through the singular cooperation of this beautiful woman, so filled with grace. We beg for the maternal intercession of the holy woman who desires nothing more now than to lead us to her Son.

In truth, we do not know what is in store for 2019. It is beyond us to know, but as we begins this new Civil Year, we beg God's blessing and protection upon our endeavors and upon our nation. May we truly strive to work together for the common good.

I believe that this surely will be a consequential year for the Church, as it seeks to address openly and honestly many serious issues that have understandably damaged her credibility in the eyes of the faithful.

May we ourselves face our challenges in a spirit of truth. May Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all seasons and of all time, bless us this day and all throughout the new year.