



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND
40th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*St Peter's Basilica
Monday, 1 January 2007*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As in a mosaic, today's liturgy contemplates different events and messianic situations, but attention is especially focused on *Mary, Mother of God*. Eight days after Jesus' birth, we commemorate the Mother, the *Theotokos*, the one who gave birth to the Child who is King of Heaven and earth for ever (cf. *Entrance Antiphon; Sedulius*).

The liturgy today meditates on the Word made man and repeats that he is born of the Virgin. It reflects on the circumcision of Jesus as a rite of admission to the community and contemplates God who, by means of Mary, gave his Only-Begotten Son to lead the "new people". It recalls the name given to the Messiah and listens to it spoken with tender sweetness by his Mother. It invokes peace for the world, Christ's peace, and does so through Mary, Mediatrix and Cooperator of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 60-61).

We are beginning *a new solar year* which is a further period of time offered to us by divine Providence in the context of the salvation inaugurated by Christ. But did not the eternal Word enter time precisely through Mary? In the Second Reading we have just listened to, the Apostle Paul recalls this by saying that Jesus was born "of woman" (Gal 4: 4).

In today's liturgy *the figure of Mary*, true Mother of Jesus, God-man, *stands out*. Thus, today's Solemnity is not celebrating an abstract idea but a mystery and an historic event: Jesus Christ, a divine Person, is born of the Virgin Mary who is his Mother in the truest sense.

Today too, *Mary's virginity* is highlighted, in addition to her motherhood. These are two prerogatives that are always proclaimed together, inseparably, because they complement and qualify each other. Mary is Mother, but a Virgin Mother; Mary is a virgin, but a Mother Virgin. If either of these aspects is ignored, the mystery of Mary as the Gospels present her to us, cannot be properly understood.

As Mother of Christ, Mary is also *Mother of the Church*, which my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI chose to proclaim on 21 November 1964 at the Second Vatican Council. Lastly, Mary is the *Spiritual Mother of all humanity*, because Jesus on the Cross shed his blood for all of us and from the Cross he entrusted us all to her maternal care.

Let us begin this new year, therefore, by looking at Mary whom we received from God's hands as a precious "talent" to be made fruitful, a providential opportunity to contribute to bringing about the Kingdom of God.

In this atmosphere of prayer and gratitude to the Lord for the gift of a new year, I am pleased to address my respectful thoughts to the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who have desired to take part in today's solemn Celebration.

I cordially greet Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State. I greet Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino and the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and express to them my deep gratitude for the commitment with which they daily promote these values, so fundamental to social life.

For this World Day of Peace, I addressed the customary [Message](#) to the Governors and Leaders of Nations, as well as to all men and women of good will. Its theme this year is: *The human person, the heart of peace*.

I am deeply convinced that "respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism" ([Message for World Peace Day](#), 1 January 2007, n. 1).

This commitment is especially incumbent on every Christian who is called "to be committed to tireless peace-making and strenuous defence of the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights" ([Message](#), n. 16). Precisely because he is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1: 27), every human individual without distinction of race, culture or religion, *as a person is clothed in God's same dignity*. For this reason he should be respected, nor can any reason ever justify an arbitrary use of him, as if he were an object.

In the face of the threats to peace that are unfortunately ever present, the situations of injustice and violence that persist in various areas of the earth and the continuing armed conflicts often

overlooked by the majority of public opinion, as well as the danger of terrorism that clouds the serenity of peoples, it is becoming more necessary than ever *to work for peace together*. This, as I recalled in my *Message*, is "both gift and task" (n. 3): a gift to implore with prayer and a task to be carried out with courage, never tiring.

The Gospel narrative we have heard portrays the scene of the shepherds of Bethlehem, who after hearing the Angel's announcement go to the grotto to worship the Child (cf. Lk 2: 16). Should we not look again at the dramatic situation marking the very Land in which Jesus was born? How can we not entreat God with insistent prayers for the day of peace to arrive as soon as possible in that region too, the day on which the current conflict that has lasted far too long will be resolved?

If a peace agreement is to endure, it must be based on respect for the dignity and rights of every person. I express to the representatives of the nations present here my hope that the International Community will muster its forces so that a world may be built in God's Name in which the essential human rights are respected by all. For this to happen, people must recognize that these rights are not only based on human agreements but "on man's very nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God" (*Message*, n. 13).

Indeed, were the constitutive elements of human dignity entrusted to changeable human opinions, even solemnly proclaimed human rights would end by being weakened and variously interpreted. "Consequently, it is important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights" (*ibid.*).

"*The Lord bless you and keep you... lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace*" (Nm 6: 24, 26). This is the formula of the Blessing we heard in the First Reading, taken from the Book of Numbers. The Lord's Name is repeated in it three times. This gives one an idea of the intensity and power of the Blessing, whose last word is "peace".

The biblical term *shalom*, which we translate as "peace", implies that accumulation of good things in which consists the "salvation" brought by Christ, the Messiah announced by the Prophets. We Christians therefore recognize him as the Prince of Peace. He became a man and was born in a grotto in Bethlehem to bring peace to people of good will, to all who welcome him with faith and love.

Thus, peace is truly the gift and commitment of Christmas: *the gift* that must be accepted with humble docility and constantly invoked with prayerful trust, *the task* that makes every person of good will a "channel of peace".

Let us ask Mary, Mother of God, to help us to welcome her Son and, in him, true peace. Let us ask her to sharpen our perception so that we may recognize in the face of every human person, the

Face of Christ, the heart of peace!

© Copyright 2007 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana