

HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD
January 1, 2017, given at the Cathedral of St. Matthew

One day is not enough for the celebration of a major feast. Here we are at the eighth day still celebrating Christmas, just as we will do when Easter comes around. Octaves were common for festivals in the Old Testament, like Hanukkah and Passover. The eighth day was also an important day after the birth of a Jewish boy. That day he was circumcised and given his name – making him a son of Abraham by that mark in the flesh. The church used to celebrate this eighth day after Christmas as the Feast of the Circumcision, or the feast of the Holy Name, the events recorded in today's gospel.

With the changes that came in the liturgy after the Vatican II, restoring some feast days to more ancient traditions, today, the eighth day, was dedicated to Mary under the title Mother of God. Pope Paul VI was very much interested in promoting Marian devotion through the revision of the liturgical calendar. In his Apostolic Exhortation, [Marialis Cultus](#), of February 1974 Pope Paul VI explained:

In the revised ordering of the Christmas period it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the "holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life."

St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians; "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law ... so that we might receive adoption as sons." But it was not until the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries that the dogmas were confirmed that Jesus is God as well as man, and that Mary is theotokos, the God bearer. So we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners..." Mother of God is one of the most important of her many titles, such as Immaculate Conception, Mother of the Church, and Queen of Peace. That brings us to another aspect of today's celebration. In the same Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Paul VI wrote:

[This day] is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk. 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace. It is for this reason that, in the happy concurrence of the Octave of Christmas and the first day of the year, we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an occasion that is gaining increasing support and already bringing forth fruits of peace in the hearts of many.

I am sure that longing for peace resonates with all people of good will. Yet there is so much strife, war, violence, and disregard for human life. What will it take,

what can we do, to bring about peace anywhere and everywhere? There can be no peace without granting and seeking forgiveness. It begins at home, in the heart. “Make me an instrument of your peace,” sang St. Francis. Jesus asks us to do what he did. “Bless those who curse you,” and “Pray for those who persecute you.” At the Advent Day of Reflection for consecrated life at the Pastoral Center, presenter Sr. John Sheila Galligan, IHM, gave us a tool for practicing forgiveness. It uses the very blessings Moses gave to Aaron that we heard in the first reading. Add a personal name to each blessing, the name of anyone who irritates you, annoys, or angers you. “The Lord bless you, Charlie, and keep you.” “The Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you, Amanda.” “The Lord look upon you kindly, Don, and give you peace.” Do it every day for a week or a month. Be open to the Lord changing your attitude and let him take care of the other’s.

It could be a good New Year’s resolution to do that for all the persons or issues that disturb our peace. Do not forget to ask forgiveness too where it is needed to bring about reconciliation and healing. In union with Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Peace, let us give to her Son, the Prince of Peace, along with the Father and Holy Spirit, all glory, honor, praise and obedience now and forever. AMEN.