

## **Homily Mary the Mother of God 2017**

Liturgically, today being the Eighth day of Christmas commemorates: the Solemnity of the Mother of God; the day designated for prayers for global peace; and the beginning of the New Year. This Feast Day was introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1967, and is recognised by the Church as World Day of Peace.

The Greek Orthodox word for this Feast day describes Mary as 'Theo-tokos' – God-Bearer. It is a way for the Church to say that the One whom Mary bore in her womb was no mere prophet or guru or wonder-worker, but EMMANU-EL – God with us, God embodied, God enfleshed. Hence: Theotokos, Godbearer.

In the Western Church, the title 'Mother of God' is used to convey the same truth, It is less clinical, more relational, less instrumental, more personal – in short, it is maternal and therefore more human, it reinforces the notion of God-with-us, not God-over-us. As soon as one proclaims Mary to be 'Mother of God', one immediately signifies a relationship, a loving, nurturing relationship which goes well beyond carrying in the womb to a safe birth.

In today's Gospel; (virtually the same as the gospel used at the dawn liturgy on Christmas Day) the shepherds gain insight into the presence of God by their visitation to this holy family, but it is Mary who holds all these things in her heart. She is the one who ponders the significance of these

mysterious events, despite what would appear to be a lot of excitement around the birth of her child. In this Mary is for us an inspiration of contemplation and reflection.

In this contemplation of Peace that the notion of “God-with-us” comes to bring we are invited in our daily lives and interactions to find the space to contemplate the message of the Angels to these same Shepherds. “Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace among those whom he favours”. Luke 2:14.

*The consequence of this favour of God is that by becoming God-with-Us, he is God-with-All, God-for-All. The Peace that his Christ comes to bring is the same Peace-for-All. Our contemplation of this reality should inspire a deeper perspective on our equality with each other.*

Blessed Pope Paul VI was inspired by his devotion to Mary as Mother of God and by his predecessor St John XXIII's Pastoral Encyclical; *Pacem in Terris*. In the First message for the World Day of Peace on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 1968; Paul VI wrote; “Peace is the only true direction of human progress – and not the tensions caused by ambitious nationalisms, nor conquests by violence, nor repressions which serve as mainstay for a false civil order.”

As Mother and Disciple Mary can inspire us to consider deeply the significance of daily or worldly events, lest we go blandly through life without meaning or direction. She

calls us to contemplate what effect our own attitudes and actions play in these events.

She calls us to fidelity to the practices of our faith, practices which are the disciplines of soul that lead the Christian Community to a clearer focus on God's presence in human affairs and God's desire for peace in those affairs.

Mary, by the model of her own life as Mother and Disciple invites us to be God-Bearers in as much as we are all called to be the "*Bearers of God's Peace*". It is Mary's calm in the midst of great events that makes this day an appropriate one to mark as World Day of Peace.

I conclude with an excerpt from Pope Francis in this year's message for Peace.

"All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers". In 2017, may we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home. "Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace".