

Mary Mother of God 2024 “Invitation to Contemplation”

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My friends, we have meditated a lot on the role of Mary in Salvation History during this past season of Advent. As I meditated on the Gospel reading today, I couldn't help but be struck by the sentence, “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” In one sentence St. Luke summarized the heart of contemplative life. And it is good for all of us to hear this because I don't think we are a very contemplative people in our culture. I sometimes wonder if what makes a lot of people itch about coming to Church on Sunday, or on a feast day, is because unconsciously, we know that we are going to have to exercise the self-control it takes to not look at our phones for an hour. Don't get me wrong, smart phones are a modern miracle, but not without its problems. One of them is attention deficit disorder, not to mention they are highly addictive. If the thought of turning off your phone for a day gives you the sweats you know what I am talking about.

Yes, the Gospel says, “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”. Bottom line: many of us have forgotten how to do that. However, if we truly want to hear God speaking to us, if we really want to know what he wants from us, if we want to feel his love, his wisdom, his healing presence, in whatever grief we are going through, we must learn how to quiet our minds and learn how to contemplate again. We must find that interior place inside of us again. We won't find the answers we are looking for on Google. ChatGPT cannot give us the spiritual insights we hunger for. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life for us. It is therefore most fitting that we begin the New Year with Mary the mother of our Lord.

You see, Mary is the first disciple, the first to say yes to the Lord in the most intimate way by becoming his mother. She was able to say yes to God's plan for her, first and foremost, because she had a place of such interiority so remarkable that she could not only hear God's voice in her heart, she could also give him birth. Or, as St. John put it, through Mary, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”.

To bring this picture to the most local level, I imagine if you are like me, you may have prayerfully made plans for yourself for the New Year. It is OK if you didn't. However, I personally think New Year resolutions are what can truly make a new year “new” rather than just a continuation of the old. Whether it is to lose weight, accomplish other personal goals at home or at work, set priorities for family life, write a book, whatever it is, all of us perhaps have an idea or goal that rests in the realm of potentiality within us. It might have been in the realm of potentiality in us for years, wanting to become real, waiting to become real.

I believe the realm of potentiality is that place deep within our soul where all our goals live. The movement of these goals from the land of potentiality to the land of actuality is a thought process that is usually in high gear this time of year. In my opinion, it is better when this process becomes a spiritual process, a contemplative process, an interior process, and a prayerful

process. However, even then, how difficult it is to make potentialities actualities without God's help.

I think the biggest culprit keeping us from accomplishing our goals is a lack of interiority. Every year, our culture tempts us to become a little more attention deficit, bit by bit. We rush from this thing to that without stopping and asking ourselves where was God in that moment? Where was God in that good time or even that bad time? You see, theology 101, God is always present in every situation, God is never not present (by definition) however, it takes the kind of soul that knows how to quiet the mind so to encounter God in whatever is happening. It takes a kind of soul that knows how to keep these things in our heart, if we want the potentialities that dwell within us to become actualities, to take flesh, so to speak.

My friends, the Good News is that on God's side too, there is a realm of potentiality and the realm of actuality. The land of potentiality is what God hopes for us. The land of actuality is where God allows us to be because he will not coerce good decisions out of us. Love to be love, must be free. However, what we celebrate at Christmas is that God's idea on how to save us became an actuality through Mary's yes. In the incarnation, the message is God is one of us. God is in solidarity with us. God loves us and will not abandon us in the good times or in our bad times. Indeed, God is telling us on this feast day and telling you on the first day of an uncertain 2025, "I am one of you, I love you, I will not abandon you".

On the feast day of Mary, Mother of God, and on the first day of a new year, we celebrate a young woman who had such profound interiority that the Word of God spoken to her could actually become flesh and dwell among us. It happened and this miracle can happen for us too, albeit in a lesser but no less salvific way. God desperately wants to be incarnate in our lives. Jesus even gave us himself in the Eucharist in case we missed that point. Yes, in this new year, God has something to say to you, and it may change your life. We just need to learn how to quiet our minds enough so to hear him before that word can become flesh. Mary shows us the way.