

THE FULLNESS OF TIME IN JESUS THROUGH MARY

Holy Mary, Mother of God.
31 December 1978

Numbers 6, 22-27

Galatians 4, 4-7

Luke 2, 16-21

Dear sisters and brothers, radio listeners, and all, a very happy new year.

We heard the best greeting the Church has in the first reading, inspired by God himself: *“This is how you are to call down my name on my people: ‘May Yahweh bless you and keep you. May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May Yahweh uncover his face to you and bring you peace’”(1).* It is God’s greeting to humanity, to those who accept his word.

At the end of the year it is good to stop and reflect sincerely on how God has spoken to us during the year which is ending. He has been a Father, concerned with blessing, leading and giving peace to his children. And our hearts fill with gratitude: “Thank you, Father, you have been a true father to us, a source of peace, no discontent, you alone have the words of eternal life.

God, the source of all good

Our first thought is for God, source of all goodness, to whom we recommend ourselves and this year about to begin. What will it bring? We don’t know. But we do know a kind hand is guiding the ship, the hand of our Father, and like children we feel ourselves wrapped up in his love, his omnipotence, his charity, his wisdom, so that we can say the coming year will be good owing to God. We can expect nothing bad from God. Everything He has for us is summed up in his initial greeting: “The Lord bless you and protect you, and shine on you.” (2)

And when the Bible says: *“They are to call down my name on the sons of Israel”* (3), this is not just an invocation. The Bible expression has a deeper sense than in our language today. To call the name of God on a people means renewing his alliance, living anew the commitment God has made: *“I will be your God and you will be my people”*. (4) It is like a new baptism. In baptism - where we become children of God and are made his people – God establishes an alliance with us, and every time the Lord’s name is invoked on this people of the alliance, the alliance is renewed. This night, at this moment, here in the cathedral, celebrating the eucharist, we are calling the name of God on the people and the people is ratifying its alliance. Coming to Mass is not just a pious act; it is to ratify, confirm again and make present, on this last day of December 1978, my firm intention to belong to God, and also his divine resolve: “I will be your God”. My brothers and sisters, let us trust him.

And if, looking back on the year, we see a God offended by neglect or perhaps by the sins I have committed or which I, one with my people, feel the people have committed

against Him, in begging his protection and blessing, I experience forgiveness as well: “You are a God of goodness, and your alliance is precisely to remove sin and give us your grace.

Christ, the fulness of time

A second thought. In the second reading another thought strikes us: “*When the appointed time came*” (5). Each year that dies and each year that begins is time moving on. But this is our concept. According to the Bible, God directs time in accordance with his will for us. Thus it speaks of the time of God’s visitation, of his anger, of his blessings. And speaking of us, the Bible says: “*a time for laughter, a time for mourning*” (6). And speaking of nature, it says “at the time of the breeze”, “at the time when the sun shines or there is darkness in the night” (7). As if nature and all that God made was conceived with this biblical idea of time, to establish a dialogue with humanity, a work we can call the history of salvation. For this he created the world, beginning with time. The years began to pass and, at this beginning of creation, God’s project would end of the day of Yahweh at the end of time with Jesus announcing: the coming, the return of the Lord, the *parousia*, the new appearance of Christ, redeemer of mankind.

Between this beginning and end of time lies history. And there is a moment in this history which, in God’s mind, is called “the fullness of time” or, as St Paul says, “*When the appointed time came*” (8). According to this, God began by creating history, nature and human beings, and time began to run towards its fullness. What is the fullness of time? In God’s plan, the fullness of time is his coming to save mankind, his incarnation, the incarnation of Christ: “*The Word was made flesh and lived among us*” (9).

And this is the moment when history arrives at its fullness, when the years laden with hope, anxiety, the desire for he who is to come, according to the words of the prophets, has finally arrived. And there we find the Virgin Mary. This is why, at the beginning of the year on the 1st of January, we celebrate, as we are doing now, the feast of Mary’s motherhood, or rather of Holy Mary, Mother of God. Blessed the woman we meet at this precise moment in time! God made her holy and immaculate as a new paradise, a new source of humanity from which his Son could take the human flesh promised during long years of hope; from Mary who gave birth to Jesus. St Paul says of this night: “*When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman*” (10). Never has the name of woman had such a sublime meaning as, on Christmas night, a woman gave birth to a Son who is, at the same time, God made man. It is the night of the fullness of time. The fullness of time arrives in Jesus, through Mary.

So in Christ is the fulfilment of all God’s promises, as St Paul states: “*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, ‘Abba, Father’, and it is this that makes you a son, you are not a slave any more; and if God made you son, then he has made you heir.*” (11) This is the fullness of time: when humanity has reached the height of its history through Christ who brings the fullness of time, and mankind becomes children of God and heirs to heaven. How beautiful it is to walk now in time, after Christ has come and given history its fullness! We now walk as children, shouting “Father! Abba!”. We are not simply creatures; time has become for us almost eternity. The years pass, but one who lives in God’s grace lives the fullness of time.

This is why, brothers and sisters, in this new year and the beginning of 1979, we should be very happy. It doesn’t matter that the years pass, what does matter is that they

should be full of God's grace. It is related that St Francis of Sales used to greet the new year with these words: "Happy New Year, may you spend it in God's grace". I believe this is a beautiful gospel greeting: "That you spend it in the fullness of time, that your days pass full of the Lord's grace, that you don't age committing more sin, but wipe sin out". In the fullness of time there should be no sin. In the fullness of time, we should be crying lovingly to the Father without sin: "I am your heir, I have your life in my heart, you have given me Christ, I want to be your brother". If we don't live the passing years in this way, we don't live the fullness of time. The person who lives in sin hasn't realized that the fullness of time arrived twenty centuries ago. Living in sin and not experiencing God's grace or the joy of being a child of God who, at death, inherits heaven, is not to enjoy the beauty of life. And I wish for all of you a New Year in which you really experience the fullness of Christ who has been born of Mary.

Mary, Mother of God

So I end with my third point: Mary. In this feast of the divine motherhood, Mary is the model of a person who, before conceiving Christ in her womb, conceived him in her mind and heart. So when a woman from the crowd, enthused by Christ, cries out: "*Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked*", Christ replies: "*Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it*" (12). It wasn't disrespect to his mother but rather praise of her, as if to say: "My mother is not happy because she has the womb and breasts of a woman; if so my mother could have been any woman in the world. The greatness of this woman was that she listened to God's word and was holy. So in her womb and at her breasts I, the son of God, felt all the more pleasure in that, more than taking in a mother's milk, I experienced the warmth of Christian love, the holiness of a creature who understood the fullness of time and lived only for God."

This is why Mary's motherhood is great, because she knew how to listen to God's word and put it into practice. And in tonight's gospel, after the shepherds had left, we find this intimate observation from Luke: "*As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart*" (13). This was her task. And if she felt anything, in the humility of not corresponding to the greatness of God's saving design, it was this: "*I am the handmaid of the Lord who looked on my littleness, I will offer him the emptiness of my humility so that he can fill it with the fullness of God.*" (14) This is what God wants from us so, if not with Mary's perfection, let us at least imitate her humility and the poverty of the shepherds: "*They went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.*" (15)

And so, my dear brothers and sisters, the New Year begins in an atmosphere of Christmas, an atmosphere which Scripture recalls: "*When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman*" (16). In this atmosphere the year begins, as if it were saying: time is not just a measure of life; it is a concept that is philosophical, Greek, quantitative. In its biblical sense, time is experience, God's gift, a meeting between God and humanity. The days of 1979 are not just to count how many have passed and how many are left. They should help us savour the fullness that Christ has brought. It is not important that so many or how many days have passed; what is important is to live them in the fullness of love for the Lord.

So, dear brothers and sisters, in the light of these three readings, I wish you, by the Lord's command and through my priestly ministry which tells me to call down his name on

the people reminding them of his alliance and the love he has for them, at the beginning of the year, instead of the profane “Happy New Year”, the words of Scripture: “*May Yahweh bless you and keep you. May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May Yahweh uncover his face to you and bring you peace*” (17). Happy New Year.

Marginal References (1) Nb 6,24-27; (2) Nb 6,24-25; (3) Nb 6,27; (4) Lv 26,12; (5) Gal 4,4; (6) Qo 3,4; (7) Gn 1,14-17; (8) Gal 4,4; (9) Jn 1,14; (10) Gal 4,4; (11) Gal 4,6-7; (12) Lk 11,27-28; (13) Lk 2,10; (14) Lk 1,38; (15) Lk 2,20; (16) Gal 4,4; (17) Nb 6,24-26.