

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God Dcn. Bill O'Donnell

Mary has many titles, probably close to 300 official titles and countless unofficial ones. We are familiar with a good number of them. Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel come to mind immediately. The Immaculate Conception and Queen of the Holy Rosary are two others closer to our daily lives.

Some are more obscure and very poetic like:

Created Temple of the Creator and Forthbringer of the Ancient of Days and how about Healing Balm of Integrity. These are official titles recognized by the Church.

There are probably thousands that are not official but have special meaning. One such name for Mary is Our Lady of Nebraska. St. Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha has a side chapel dedicated in her honor. It has a beautiful white marble statue of Mary holding an ear of corn. I spent many hours of prayer in that chapel and I doubt that image of Our Lady will ever leave me.

However, the one title that surpasses all others, the one that speaks volumes, the one that we celebrate today is Mother of God.

From an earthly perspective, from a human perspective, there is no title that can conjure up more feelings than that of "mother". Maybe not for all, but for most of us it is a name given to a person dear to us, one who embodies a type of love for us that words fail to describe.

Use the name Mother of God and that changes everything doesn't it? It is a title unique in all of history. It describes, without too much wriggle room, the Virgin Mary, who conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Person of Jesus Christ.

But why celebrate a day by that name in the Church? Why does the Church think it is so important that it is one of only a handful of Holy Days of Obligation?

We celebrate it because it confirms and solidifies something that we have

just finished celebrating. The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God sets in our hearts the essential truth of Christmas.

The Title, the use of the words Mother of God speaks to the truth of the **incarnation**.....of God becoming completely united with our humanity. In fact the very purpose of the title and for its celebration is to leave no doubt in our hearts and minds that Jesus was fully human and fully God.

It is not correct to think of Jesus as someone who is a split person, part God and part man. That maybe it was the God part of Him that worked miracles and the human part of Him that slept in the boat or even died on the cross.

It is in fact a heresy, defined by the Church at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 to assert that Jesus was anything other than fully God and fully human. The Council was called to state once-and-for-all the nature of Jesus Christ. There were some who claimed that Mary had conceived and gave birth to the humanity of Jesus, but not His divinity. By declaring Mary to be the Mother of God at that Council, it makes clear to us that Jesus did not simply put on human flesh, the way one might put on a costume. He is not God imitating a man, but the God-Man, like us in all things but sin.

The dignity that Jesus gave to our humanity is echoed in the silent prayer at each and every Mass prayed when the drop of water is poured into the wine before, and that is key, before it is consecrated. "**By the mingling of this water and wine, may we come to share in your divinity as you humbled yourself to share in our humanity.**"

When the water and wine are mingled, they cannot be separated again. And that is what happens in the incarnation. God mingles His divinity with humanity. And what God has joined together....let no man separate.

The dignity Jesus bestows upon women and motherhood is also beyond compare. Last Sunday we read in the Gospel that Jesus, the God-Man subjected himself to His Mother Mary and to St. Joseph, His Earthy father. The Creator of the Universe willed to learn how to nail a board from Joseph. God himself, learned to say His prayers from Mary. What does that say about the dignity of work, the value of learning and the importance of

prayer?

Now, to clear up any questions, I need to say that it is incorrect to say or to even infer that Mary was the mother of the Triune God, that is, that she was the mother of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That would also be an impossibility as God is without beginning or end. God in that sense cannot have a mother as God was not born.

(SHIFT) (PAUSE)

However, the One God, that has been revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by a Mystery of Mercy, willed that the Second Person, the Son unite Himself with humanity not just for a little while, but for all eternity.

And while we do not diminish the role of Mary, today is really not about her, but about what **God did** through her obedient and willing heart.

Paul states this truth very eloquently in our second reading:

When the fullness of time had come, (not the nick of time or the best time, or even the right time, but he fullness of time) (God did what?) God sent his Son, (how?) born of a woman, born under the law, (why?) to ransom those under the law, (that's us, but to what end?) so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters (of who?) the Father. And if we are sons and daughters of God the Father, then we are heirs of that same God through the incarnation of God.

And to be an heir is to inherit everything!

So you see, it is good to celebrate the name of Mary, because by a singular grace, she is indeed, the Mother of God. But we primarily celebrate what God did, through Mary.

And this day is our celebration as well, for through the incarnation, by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been made heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. That is our dignity, that is our destiny, our greatest hope and our source of joy.