

Faith Reflections

[Instead of the usual Homily Notes for every Sunday, it was decided to take various themes and reflect on them. Such an attempt will not limit the reflection only to the particular Sunday but will have greater relevance even beyond a particular Sunday. Your comments are welcome. -The Editor]

Mary: Mother of God

Yandava Joseph Naresh

Christmas is the feast of God's love for humanity. We say that God is love but no one had seen the love of God. The baby that was born at Bethlehem was the love of God made incarnate and made visible. Today, is the Octave of Christmas. We are taken once again to the scene of the Nativity. The Church is stressing on Mother Mary's part in this wonderful mystery of God's love for us. That is why we celebrate the feast of Mary, Mother of God. Someone might ask: 'How can Mary really be the Mother of God?' True, Mary was the mother of Christ' human nature and she did not produce his divinity. True, that the mother of an ordinary human child produces only its body not its soul, for God, directly creates each soul. Yet, we say without hesitation that she is a mother. In a similar way, since Christ is once person, even though Mary has not produced his divine nature, she is well and truly the mother of the whole Christ, who is true God and true man.

God had bestowed on Mary many privileges but the greatest of them of all was her Divine Motherhood. Because she was to be the mother of God, God preserved her from 'Original Sin.' It is because of her divine motherhood that God bestowed upon her

greater graces than those he bestowed on the highest of angels and saints. It was because of her Divine Motherhood that, at her death, God preserved her body from corruption and assumed her body into heaven. But when Mary uttered her “fiat”, her “yes”, in response to the message of the Angel Gabriel, she became not only the Mother of God in the physical order of nature, but also in the supernatural order of grace, she became the mother of all who would be made one under the headship of her Divine Son. The mother of the head would be the mother of the branches. Our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is the only son of our blessed mother by flesh. But Our Lady has to have other children, not, according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The spiritual maternity of Mary is realized in a very real sense in the work of redemption. When Jesus offered himself on the cross as a spotless victim, Mary united her offering with that of her son and thus in a very real sense cooperated in the work of redemption. It was in the hands of Mary that the first oblation was made on the day of the Presentation in the Temple and, it was in her company and with her full cooperation, that the sacrifice of the baby through shedding of blood at the circumcision was completed. Lastly, this spiritual maternity of Mary is realized by her sharing in the distribution of graces. According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, she can distribute the graces to whomsoever she pleases, and when she wishes and in whatever manner she chooses.

She is our true Mother whose love for us has no limit. All the love that mothers bear their children or have ever had for their children is but a shadow in comparison with the love Mary bears for each one of us. (Based on Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

Called for the Glory of God

Jino V. O.

The Word of God invites us to ponder over certain aspects of the Divine call. The call of God is beyond the expectations and criteria of human thinking. As a means for the fulfillment of the plans of God, He calls whomever He likes, without any consideration of place, age and abilities. But certain basic qualities are required

from our part. The first is, to be in the presence of God. In the first reading Samuel is seen besides the Ark of God. It's the same as that of being in the presence of God where the chances of hearing the call of God will be very high. The second is the willingness to respond to the call. The call calls for a response. By our response, we know the call. If one does not respond to the call at the right time, it cannot be answered in the right spirit. Here, Samuel was sleeping in the temple but he did not hesitate to respond even though his sleep was interrupted.

In order to discern whether it's a call to religious life a senior and a God- experienced person's guidance is an inevitable factor. Those who experienced God can easily realize the call of God and can direct others in the right way. Here, in the case of Samuel, Eli became instrumental in interpreting that it was a call from God. In the Gospel also, we see similar incidents where John the Baptist directs his own disciples to follow Jesus. His attitude is like that of a mere servant as Jesus mentions earlier "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (cf. Luke 17:10) This attitude of John the Baptist really challenges us because many of us forget the real purpose of our call and, instead of directing others to Christ, we attempt to draw them to follow us.. The clear understanding of one's own mission is very important to realize that we have been to be 'called' up into the very heart of Jesus. This act of pointing others to Christ is also done by the first two disciples who experienced Jesus first. Those who experience Christ cannot keep that experience to themselves for it needs to flow out to others.

Another important aspect we see at the end of the Gospel is Jesus changing Simon's name to Peter. This act of changing a name has a lot of implications in the Hebrew tradition. Primarily, in the mind of the Hebrew, the name contains within itself the "soul," the character of a man, indicating what he is in the depth of his being. In fact, no one had ever been called by the name of Peter till then. The definite task to be the 'rock' upon which Christ's Church will be built is given to Peter by this act. The divine vocation is transformed into a specific mission conferred by the Mes-

siah.

The purpose of our divine call is clearly mentioned in the Second Reading, that is, the glory of God and his kingdom. For that, purity of life is very much important. St. Peter reminds us “as he who called you is holy, be holy in all your conduct” (cf. 1 Pet 1:15). This call is not restricted to priesthood or religious life. As St. Paul advises the Corinthians “in whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God” (cf. 1 Cor 7:24). It is the call for each and every one of us to remain attached to God in holiness. In the Gospel passage, it is clearly mentioned that ‘they remained with Him’. After remaining with Jesus, only the first two disciples could point out Jesus to others. So that “remaining with God” is important.

The word of God invites us

- to live close to God
- to respond to the call of God properly
- to help others to understand the Divine Call from the abundance of our own God-experience
- to be aware of our own duties as a ‘called one’
- to glorify God through purity of life

Let us try to listen to the invitation of God and respond to our Divine Call whole heartedly.

(Based on 1Sam 3:3b-10.19; 1Cor 6:13c-15a.17-20; John 1:35-42)

Fishers of Men

Binod Hembrom

The Word of God is alive and active today and will be forever. However, the Word of God made Jonah to get up, and inspired him to go to Nineveh, that great city, in order to proclaim to it the message that Yahweh would instruct him with. Jonah accepts the invitation of God and left everything for the sake of proclaiming the Word of God. Today, this message is very applicable to each and every one of us that we much listen to the invitation of God and proclaim His Word to the whole of humanity.

We are called to be the witness of Christ by proclaiming Him as the King of the Universe and Savior of the world. As a Christian, we are called to be witnesses of Him. Just as the disciples of Jesus did it in their life time. They were asked to be the witnesses of those things which they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears and experienced with their hearts, of Jesus, as their Master. We too, have the same disposition towards Him, as disciples of Jesus had. The very identification of being a Christian depends upon in projecting Christ to the world by our way of life.

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians reminds us to be more convinced in our faith attitudes. Very radically Paul says that whatever is in this world has no meaning in terms of the long race that has to be run. But, today, our attitude to the things of the world is very different. We cannot control the desire to choose the right things which can give us real happiness in our life. We need to project ourselves as happy Christians to the world. The things of the world will not give us the inner satisfaction in our life. Today, Jesus is telling us very strongly that, everything will pass away from this world but the love of Jesus will remain with us forever. So, let's allow ourselves for change in order to be real disciple of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark (1:14-20) gives us the very essential message that "The time has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." When news reached Jesus that John was imprisoned, Jesus returned to Galilee and began to preach the Gospel. We can visualize the proclamation of the kingdom not only as a gift, but also with a demand to "repent". Here, Jesus is seen as coming in the "fullness of time", since he was the messenger promised in the Old Testament. Jesus repeats the message of John the Baptist, "Repent and believe in the Good News". The emphasis of Mark's Gospel is that Jesus' coming is the Gospel, the "good news". Jesus calls four fishermen at the Sea of Galilee - Simon, who later will be later renamed Peter, Andrew, James and John. Once again we don't know what was there about Jesus that led Simon, Andrew, James and John, and others to leave their homes and families to follow Christ. Did they know Him already? Was this their first contact with Him? In any case, there

was something remarkably compelling about Jesus to cause these and others to follow Him into an uncertain future.

We too are disciples of God, chosen and called personally by Jesus. We believe that God calls each one of us. God not only calls us to follow Jesus, but also calls us from the fields and careers of our lives. God calls people to be pastors and workers to build up his Church. But God's call is not limited to the clergy. God calls every single one of us. However, every job that works to build up and maintain society is a calling - teacher, insurance salesman, car mechanic, politician, and so on also are called within their family structures - mother, father, aunt, uncle, child, and so on serve God in family set ups. God's call is always into an uncertain future. When we enter into our calling, we have no idea how it will all end up. Hence, we believe in the Divine Providence of God. When we believe that God has called us, we will perform to the best of our ability. We need to have an inner disposition for following Christ. We need to leave everything for the sake of Christ to spread the Kingdom of God. Thus, faith is the core part of our being Christian, which turns us into His vibrant witnesses. Let's have a burning desire to be deeply rooted in our faith in order to project ourselves as true ambassadors of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God.

(Based on Jn 3: 1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20)

To Know to Believe to Forgive

Kuruvilla Pandikattu

To Know:

- The Lord knows me much more than I know myself, since he is closer to me than I am to myself.
- He knows my weakness, my vulnerability
- He knows me - personally, intimately, directly. Yet He accepts me, affirms me.
- It is not knowing about me, but knowing me.

* “Because God is the witness of his inmost self, and the sure observer of his heart” (Wis 1:7)

To Believe:

- Since God knows me truly and accepts me unconditionally, I have the courage to believe in myself and in God.
- It is also believing not only that but also believing in God and in myself. Believing implies that I believe that God exists, He is loving etc. But believing in implies that I truly believe in him. I rely on him. I can depend on his outpouring of grace.
- To believe in Him is difficult and challenging, but not impossible.
- Can I really believe in myself, because God, in His Unconditional Love, believes in me and enables me?
- It is still more difficult to believe in others. The God I believe in, also believes also in the others, who may not be like me. Can I believe in Pravin Tagodia, even when I do not agree with his vision? Can I believe in my friends, who make use of me at times and who irritate me? Truly, God, in his all-knowing wisdom, believes in them.
- “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree ...” (Luke 16:6)

To Forgive:

- If I know my God, who knows me personally and accepts me with all my blemishes...
- If I believe in God, who believes in me as well as my friends/enemies, I am also called to forgive them for the harm done to me.
- To forgive others is to recognize that, in spite of all my good intentions, I myself have harmed others.

- It implies that others have harmed me. I have also harmed them.
- After recognizing the depth of my fault, can I raise myself to the height of forgiveness, based on our common trust in God.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting, but enabling the wounds to make ourselves more compassionate
- If Gladys Staines could forgive Dara Singh, if Sister Selmy could forgive Samandar Singh, we too can.
- That's the only way of living together humanely.
- "If he returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him." (Lk 17: 5)

The Challenge:

- "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Martin Luther King Jr
- Can we base our forgiveness on the all-knowing wisdom and love of God alone?
- Can we truly know ourselves and others?
- Can we truly believe in the other and in God?
- Can we truly forgive ourselves and others and be more compassionate and all embracing?
- Firmly, gently, lovingly our faith is based on our Christian Vision of God knowing, believing and loving us!

"When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy." —Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi

"The most common form of despair is not being who you are." —Søren Kierkegaard