

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD - OLPH - 2014

(Luke 02:16-21)

The name "**January**" comes from the **Roman god Janus**, the god with two faces, one looking to **the past** and the other looking to **the future**. This is indeed a good time to look back at the year that has just ended and to look forward to the new year ahead of us. How did I spend this one year of my life that has just passed? Did I use it to advance my goals and objectives in life? Did I use it to enhance the purpose of my existence? Could I have done better last year in the way I invested my time between the **demands of work, family, friends and society**, and the demands of my **spiritual life**? What things did I achieve last year and what did I fail to achieve? How can I consolidate the achievements of last year while reversing the failures and losses in this new year? Through soul searching questions like these, we find that a review of the past year naturally leads to setting goals and resolutions for the new year.

There are people who tell you that there is no point making new year resolutions. Do not believe them. We must set goals and make resolutions as a necessary conclusion to our review of the past year. And we do need to review our lives from year to year because, as Socrates says, *the unexamined life is not worth living*.

Today's newspapers are full of individual and collective new year resolutions. Most of those, however, are not resolutions at all but only wishes. What is the difference between a resolution and a wish? A wish identifies a goal one wants to reach, a resolution specifies the steps one will take to reach it. A wish says this is where I want to be, a resolution says this is the road I will take, this is what I will do to get there. The wishful person says "I want to pass my exams this year" and the resolved person says "I will devote an extra hour to my studies everyday in order to pass my exams." The wishful person says "I will have more peace and love in my family this year" and the resolved person says "I will spend more time with my family at table instead of rushing off to the TV, so that we get to know and understand ourselves better." The wishful person says "I will live a life of union with God this year" and the resolved person says "I will set aside this time everyday to pray and hear God's word." The difference between wishing and resolving is: are we prepared to do what it takes to make our dreams come true, are we prepared to pay the price?

"Who do people say I am?" Jesus once asked; and *"Who do you say I am?"* (Mt 16:15). It is a question that never goes away, and every believer faces it again and again. Throughout the centuries every possible answer has been given. Followers of Nestorius, the 5th-century archbishop of Constantinople said that Christ was two persons – the man Jesus and the divine Son of God. This view

was rejected at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD), which insisted that Jesus was one person with two natures, divine and human. The most emphatic way they could say this was to affirm that Mary was not just the mother of the man Jesus, but that she was the mother of God. This was to say that Christ was one person, not two. The word used was 'Theotokos' (Greek for 'God-bearer'). The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) continued the use of this term, and it has become orthodox Christian teaching. Note that it is more a statement about Christ than about Mary – or rather, equally so.

Mother of God is Mary's most noble title and the gospel today presents Mary to us as a mother and as a model of a new life in Christ that we all should wish for ourselves in the New Year. There we see that Mary was prepared to do something to realize this goal. What did she do? We read that the shepherds, when they went to adore the Child Jesus in the manger, told all that the angels had said to them. *"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19). Again after the boy Jesus was found in the Temple, we are told that *"His mother treasured all these things in her heart"* (Luke 2:51). Mary was a woman who valued the word of God, who treasured it and made time to meditate and ponder it. It is true that the holiness of Mary is attributed to the grace of God, but this should not make us forget that she needed to make an effort in order to cooperate with the grace of God. She pondered the word of God in order to discern what God was saying to her at every stage in her life as the handmaid of God.

The two examples above of Mary pondering the word of God, namely, after the visit of the shepherds and after the finding in the temple, show that Mary found the word of God both in divine revelation (the angels' words to the shepherds) and in her own experiences (her encounter with her son in the temple). Similarly God speaks to us today through divine revelation Scriptures, the teaching and preaching of the Church as well as through our personal experiences, if only we made time to reflect on them as Mary did.

Whatever the situation in which we find ourselves - a hardship, a disappointment, a decision to make - God has a solution, an answer that is right for us. We tell God about it in prayer but we also listen to what God has to tell us about it. Prayer is a conversation with God but sometimes all we do is pick up the phone, read out the list of our problems to God and drop the phone without listening to hear what God has to say to us. Let us today resolve **to listen more to the voice of God**, to treasure God's word and ponder it in our hearts. Then shall we be able to realize our **new year resolution** of a new life in union with God.