

New Year: Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-3,56,6,8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Parish,

Happy new year!

We say and hear this celebratory greeting as we welcome the new year 2023 and the coming days. Happy new year! It conveys the common yearning of humanity! Such human yearning is expressed in booming sounds, an hour display of bursting, bright and colorful fireworks, waves of laughter and chatter, and abundant food and drinks (with many leftovers, and some still have to clean the dishes). Everything and everyone looks and sounds festive, full of excitement.

Yes, everyone yearns to be happy and looks forward to it in the coming days, and many would even put together thirteen different fruits with circular shapes because they bring good luck. But we know our faith is not in the fruits but in the person of Jesus. However, they are good decorations and a perfect reminder to eat healthily and stay fit. On the one hand, some even write resolutions to make the new year more exciting, meaningful, and a new beginning. Sometimes these resolutions are kept and followed through; sometimes, they become past accounts, like memoirs or account payables.

Everyone looks forward to a fresh start and a happy new year. While this is significant, the Church welcomes the new year 2023 with a distinctive tone. We, the Church, celebrate New Year by honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. This title, Mother of God, is given to her in the earliest times of the Church, particularly at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. It derives from the Greek word "Theotokos," which translates as "She who gave birth to God." St. Paul speaks of this in our second reading: "God sent His Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). He tells us that our Lord Jesus came not just as God's Son but also as one born to a woman. It is a veiled confirmation of our belief in Immaculate Conception, the virgin birth. St. Paul does not say that Jesus was born of a man and a woman. But he was born of a woman with God as the Father. Thus, he speaks in a veiled manner that Mary is truly the Mother of God.

As we dedicate the first day of the year to honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, we welcome the year through the eyes of Mary, or better still, through her disposition. Our Gospel describes that she kept all that had happened in her heart and pondered on them in silence (cf Lk 2:19). She silently awaited God's Word of salvation; she welcomed and listened to it; she conceived it, and in her, God became close. The two words that beautifully describe Mary's disposition are to keep and ponder, in other words, to value and meditate or to treasure and contemplate. It is a disposition that helps us discern and discover the joy we desire in the coming days.

With the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary as our companion in welcoming 2023, let us imitate her contemplative ways of keeping and pondering. This could be expressed through the three simple prayers, invoking the name of the Lord: Lord Jesus, thank you. Lord Jesus, forgive me. Lord Jesus, bless me.

1) "Lord Jesus, thank you." We thank the Lord for everything we received in 2022: wealth or poverty, good health or illness, joy or pain. It is a beautiful family tradition to bring the family together in prayer, remembering the many blessings received and in the name of the Lord, reminding each member of the family to live in gratitude, not with attitude.

2) "Lord Jesus, forgive me." We humbly ask God's forgiveness for our offenses and sins, especially our lack of faith in the past and present, and equally ask God's grace to forgive others. Hence, we repeat this in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." We ask the grace to let go of the anger and resentment

and hopefully not to roll over and accumulate. It is a good practice to remind family members to ask for forgiveness when they commit a mistake and avoid unchecked wrongdoings before it builds up into a wall of isolation and pain in family relationships.

3) "Lord Jesus, bless me." We pray this confidently because God's Mercy always looks upon us and is pleased with us, not because of who we are or what we may have done, but because we are in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, and we become sons and daughters of God. We all know that the sad realities of 2022 are still upon us, like inflation, poverty, social inequality, unemployment, crime and violence, war, COVID-19 coronavirus, some rollover family and personal problems, and what have you. But we believe God's Mercy in Jesus through the Holy Spirit is greater than all the sad realities. At Christmas, Mercy takes on our human flesh, enters into human suffering rather than standing clear of it, and is in union with us rather than standing apart from us. Jesus is Mercy; he perpetually shines on us. Imagine when we invoke the name of the Lord Jesus; what a great blessing it is that his face never ceases to shine on us, unlike the light of the fireworks, and he remains gracious forever and never withers, unlike the fruits! (cf Num 6:24-25).

Let us invoke the name of the Lord through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother. Like a mother who lovingly carries the baby in her arms, we can be confident that she will take us through our journey this new year, for no one who asked for her protection was left unaided.

Let us pray the Memorare:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help
or sought your intercession,
was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence,
We fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother;
to you do we come, before you we stand, sinful and sorrowful;
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not our petitions,
but in your Mercy, hear and answer them.

Happy new year!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor