

Feast of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Num 6:22-27

Gal 4:4-7

Lk 2:16-21

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” So asks Juliet in Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo & Juliet’ (Act 2 Scene 2). Names describe what is named and today’s feast has been known over the centuries by many differing names. It was named the Circumcision of Jesus because such procedures occurred on the eighth day after the birth of a male child. The child was also named in this ritual, so the celebration became known as the Naming of Jesus. I don’t suppose this name change was to ensure that Gentiles who were not circumcised, were not offended. More likely to be the beginning of political correctness. In the 1960 Roman Calendar it simply became described as the Octave of Christmas, and now it is known as Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

However, naming is important because it indicates a relationship between persons. In today's first reading Aaron was told how to call down God's name as a blessing on his people. In having Jesus circumcised and named, St Luke is telling us that Mary and Joseph were obedient to the Jewish Law.

In more recent times the celebration has focussed on Mary as Mother of God so stressing the divinity of Jesus, enabling us to celebrate the dual nature of the child she bore. Jesus is truly God and fully Man. Describing Mary as the Mother of God implies that she is the God bearer and there are few relationships as tender as that of mother and child.

She is also described as the spouse of the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her when she submitted to God's will at the Annunciation. Mary is the visible expression of the love that the Holy Spirit has for us. She keeps her Son close to her side yet presents Him to us as our king, priest, and redeemer. Son and Mother go together. You cannot love one without loving the other.

St Paul tells us that those who respond to God's love are also filled with the Holy Spirit and become God's adopted children sharing Mary, the Mother of the Church, as our own spiritual mother.

When we think of the Catholic Church we must think beyond the Vatican, the Pope, and the clergy. This view sees the Church as being built on the rock of Peter, which it is, but there would be no rock without the special relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary. The Christian Church began its life in the womb of Mary. These two dimensions, Mary and the Church are inseparable. They were together throughout Jesus’ earthly life; they were together at His Crucifixion and in the Upper Room for the Last Supper, at Easter and Pentecost.

When Mary and the Church are separated, the Church becomes weaker. In difficult times we must not lose heart, but rather turn to the one who leads her children to her Son and helps us to regain what has been lost through sin. She rids us of false teaching and burns through the vices of our Godless culture, replacing them with peace, order,

hope, strength, goodness, and creativity. These are the gifts that will enable us to rebuild the Church and re-evangelise our secular culture.

On the first day of this New Year, we give thanks for Mary, the holy Mother of God. Now is not the time to abandon the Church, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Confession, priestly and lay ministries, nor to give up pleading for the Virgin's intercession. It is not the time to abandon saying the Rosary, studying the faith and having the courage to invite others to come and encounter Jesus for themselves. These treasures have resurrected the Church in previous dark times. In our current dark time, they must be resolutely taken up again.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and the hour of our death.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

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