

Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God

January 1, 2006

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

by Sister Benilda Desmond, OP

The first reading for the first liturgy of the first of the year captures the true nature of the relationship between the God of the Christians and all humankind. It is, of course, the ancient Hebrew formula for God blessing the people. It identifies God as One who lets His face shine upon his creation, as One who is gracious, and gives peace. It sets the tone for all the liturgies that are to come.

The remarkable truth about the spread of Christianity is that it happened so rapidly in a pagan world that did not appear to be ready for it. The violent and oppressive society of the ancient Mediterranean worshipped gods capricious and often cruel who demanded submission and gifts.

Today's feast emphasizes the nature of the God whom Jesus taught us to call Father. Our Father looks upon the sinfulness and suffering, the hatefulness and repression of a selfish society and makes the decision not to crush and destroy this old world but to send the son to heal it. Jesus, born of a woman, born under the law was sent not to destroy but to heal, or as the second reading tells us, "to ransom us."

Jesus comes to us not in the pomp and power of military might that might well have impressed the ancient Romans, but as a baby born as all other babies from a human mother. He becomes one with us, identifies with us. He bonds with a woman, with Mary, whose stance before God was so open as to be eternally identified with her words to the angel, "Be it done to me according to your word," and Jesus becomes our brother.

The Gospel tells us he was to be named Jesus. This, in turn, lays emphasis on the reason for His coming among us and on God's commitment to blessing us and not destroying us, for Jesus means "God saves."

So, again, the Church calls upon us to remember that God so loved the world that he sent us his only son to be our savior. At the beginning of a New Year, this calls forth from each of us a commitment to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with this God who loves us so.