

Think for a moment of all that Mary had gone through up to the point of today's Gospel. An angel of God appeared to her and told her that even though she was a virgin, she would conceive and bear a son by the Holy Spirit who would be Lord and God. She saw that her cousin Elizabeth, who was barren, had a child in her old age. According to some theologians Mary, did not suffer the pains of childbirth but rather, Jesus was born like sunlight passing through a glass. And afterward her virginity remained intact. And then today we heard how shepherds show up out of nowhere because an angel told them that Mary has just given birth to the Messiah, who was destined to save his people. And yet through all this, the baby that Mary looked upon was by all appearances a normal human child.

All these things Mary kept, reflecting on them in her heart.

Sometimes it seems that we are so caught up in pondering the mystery of the divine nature of Jesus, that we forget the equally mysterious side of His human nature. What is the greater mystery, that God who is divine, has a divine nature, or that the divine God took on a human nature?

Every week we proclaim our belief that the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary and became man. Stop and think about what that means. Jesus experienced our life exactly the same way we do. He is intimately familiar

with our hopes and fears, our joys and our pains. And like us He learned much from His parents, particularly from His mother.

Joseph worked to provide for his family, something we can all relate to. And so, much of the child raising, especially the early years, depended on Mary. Think about how much Jesus received from His mother. Through her he took on His human nature. He must have resembled her, maybe the same color eyes and hair, perhaps he even had his mother's smile.

But like all of us, Jesus received more than appearance from his mother. Have you ever been accused of sounding like your mother? We pick up so many little sayings and figures of speech from our parents. I wonder if anyone ever said to Jesus, "you sound just like your mother." I'll bet Joseph did.

We can discern from scripture some of the things Jesus must have learned at the lap of the Blessed Mother. Many of the things Jesus said and taught are echoes of the conversation Mary had with the angel Gabriel, "do not be afraid," "nothing will be impossible for God," and Mary's own response "let it be done to me according to God's will."

Mary kept all these things in her heart and taught them to her son.

“Do not be afraid.” How often He repeats as a man the words He learned as a child. When his disciples are caught in a storm at sea and in danger of drowning, Jesus walks to them on the waves and called out, “it is I; do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27) When Jairus begs Jesus to cure his daughter, and word is received that she had already died, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid; ... have faith.” (Mark 5:35-36) When his disciples grow fearful about being persecuted, the Lord comforts them with these words: “Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.... Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom.” (Luke 12:6-7,32) And when Christ is transfigured before Peter, James, and John, and a mighty voice spills forth from the heavens “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him,” the disciples fall to the ground in terror. And Jesus bends over each of them, and touches them, and whispers, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” (Matthew 17:7) Even after Jesus suffers and dies, after he lays in the tomb and descends into hell, after he rises from the dead and walks out of the tomb, he repeats the words of his mother when he appears to Mary Magdalene: “Do not be afraid. Tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Matthew 28:10) And when St. Paul preaches the Gospel in Corinth and meets with threats and opposition, the Lord visits him

in a vision, and says, “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you.” (Acts 18:9-10).

“Nothing will be impossible for God,” this too Mary taught to Jesus, and Jesus taught His disciples. He taught them that it is hard to enter the Kingdom of God, that you must be like a child, you must keep the commandments, you must give your possessions to the poor, that you must take up your cross and walk the narrow way. And his disciples were astonished, and asked, “Then who can be saved?” And Jesus comforts them with the words his mother taught him: “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.” (Mark 10:25-27)

And most wonderful of all, Mary taught her son “May it be done to me according to your word.” Jesus learns this lesson so well, that when he becomes a man, he teaches his followers to repeat his mother’s words: “Your kingdom come, your will be done.” At Gethsemane, when he enters the hour of his greatest trial, when the temptation to walk away, to save himself, is so strong that the struggle within Him causes Him to sweat blood, he falls to his knees in the garden and prays as his mother taught him:

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42)

“Do not be afraid,” “with God all things are possible,” “your will be done” these are words at the heart of the Gospel. These are the words of Jesus that call us to hope instead of fear in the face of an increasingly hostile world. These are words that call us to repentance and trust in the face of our sins; words that call us to obey. They call us to straighten our backs and steady our hands and work to make God’s will real for the poor, the sick, the stranger, and the lost. These words are filled with comfort and compassion, but they are not weak; these words show us the way, but they are not easy. They are commands, hard commands: to be as strong as the lion of Judah, to be as fearless as a prophet, to be as obedient as an angel. Not on our own, not by our own strength, not through our own virtue, but through the strength of the Holy Spirit which comes upon every Christian. A strength which seeks to set each Christian heart on fire. These are words that say: “Grow up. Be strong. Be faithful. Be just.”

Is it any surprise that Jesus learned these words from his mother?

A little over four weeks ago we marked the beginning of the new liturgical year. Today we celebrate the beginning of the new civil year. We recall God’s blessing to His people, given to Moses. It is a blessing to us for the coming year. May God turn His face toward us and let its splendor shine upon us. At the same time, the Mother of the Lord looks upon us, her children, and

blesses us. Remember that on his cross, Jesus gave her to all of us. Mary blesses us, as both the mother of Jesus and as the immaculate Church who is His bride.

We are sons and daughters of God. He has sent His spirit into our hearts that we may joyfully cry out “Abba, Father.” This is a cry that echoes throughout the history of the Church in the Mother’s Magnificat. This is a prayer of praise that responds to the Father entirely out of the Spirit of the Son. It is a prayer that gathers up all thanksgiving from Abraham to the present. Is there a better way to launch the New Year?

So let us place the coming year under the protection of the Motherhood of Mary. Let us ask her as her children, for an understanding of true discipleship.

Like the Church, she blesses us not in her own name but in the name of her Son, who in turn blesses us in the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit.