

For Sunday, January 1, 2023

Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Numbers 6:22-27

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon

you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and

give you peace!

— Numbers 6:24-26

“Today is gonna be a Mommy-and-me day,” my preschool-aged son told me recently. He was perched on the kitchen countertop, his favorite spot in the mornings, where he likes to sit while watching me unload the dishwasher.

“Oh, is it?” I said, my hands full of damp plates. This was news to me. “What does that mean? What are we going to do?”

“We’re gonna read books and put stickers on walls and you’re gonna watch me play,” he told me. “And then at the end of the day you’re gonna make dinner and I’m gonna sit here and watch you, and we’re gonna smile at each other.”

I am not the best version of myself in the mornings, I am grumpy and anxious, and any suggestion of a deviation from the day’s planned activities usually makes me bare my teeth like a threatened Rottweiler. But my son’s little itinerary pierced me through the heart. I stopped what I was doing and looked at him. We smiled at each other.

I wrote down what he said because I didn’t want to forget it, ever. It wasn’t just that he wanted to spend the day with me. That was sweet. But what really got me in the feels was how he described it. Us watching each other, smiling at each other, turning our faces to each other in love. It was astonishing in its simplicity.

There are a lot of different kinds of prayer, a lot of different ways to be with God, to adore him, to sit in his presence. But I think the way that I like best is exactly what my son described for his Mommy-and-me day, the way that famous peasant of Ars described to St. John Vianney two centuries ago. I like when God and I sit and look at each other.

If you are blessed, as I have been, to have a warm relationship with your parents, you know the power of their gaze. You know what it is to lock eyes with them during one of life's profound moments — a moment of sadness, a moment of triumph, a moment of joy, a moment of confusion. You know that words are not necessary; sometimes they even get in the way. What you need is in the gaze.

When I reflect on the various ways I have experienced God "letting His face shine upon" me, I keep coming back to His mother. How often, for me, has God chosen Mary to communicate His kindness, His love, His protection, and His faithfulness. How often has He desired her to be the Theotokos, the "God-bearer," in my life. How often is her intercession and encouragement the means by which He turns His gaze upon me.

I think of a small Christ child sitting cross-legged on the ground two thousand years ago, watching his mother go about some domestic work as the sun rises over Nazareth. She looks up, absent-mindedly, and sees the God of Heaven and Earth smiling at her. She smiles back. Without words, they communicate. This happened for her every day.

I think of Mary at the foot of the cross, gazing up at the face she knows better than her own. The forehead is streaked with blood and the mouth is contorted in agony, and all who look upon him are stricken with despair. But not Mary. Mary sees the face of a feeble infant staring up at her from a manger. Mary sees the face of salvation. Mary sees hope. They lock eyes. Without words, they communicate.

Whatever this year brings you, be it good fortune or great trials or a mix of both, may you remember that through it all, you are under the gaze of the one who has loved you since the beginning of creation.

—Colleen Jurkiewicz Dorman

PRAYER

Remember us, O God;

from age to age be our comforter.

You have given us the wonder of time,

blessings in days and nights, seasons and years.

Bless your children at the turning of the year

and fill the months ahead with the bright hope

that is ours in the coming of Christ.