

HOMILY - January 1 – Mary, Mother of God

If you look at the liturgical calendar, the Church celebrates a great many feasts of saints, men and women from all parts of the world, FROM all periods of the Church's history. We CELEBRATE their examples of holiness, we invoke their prayers, and we ask their intercession. But today's celebration is more than another saint's day. Today we celebrate not just a SAINTLY person but also a title, and a title with an IMPORTANT dogmatic significance.

Today we celebrate the fact that Mary is 'Mother of God'. This title -- the original Greek word means 'God-bearer' -- is not simply an honorary title. When we say Mary, Mother of God, we are actually claiming that Mary, a humble young human woman, gave birth to God. We repeat these words so casually, but this truth is so SHOCKING IN ITS INFERENCE, that it caused great theological arguments in the earliest times of the Church's history. Yet it is a truth we must fully understand – A TRUTH that is essential to our CATHOLIC faith and to our salvation.

How can Mary be literally 'Mother of God'? God has no beginning, SO It would seem impossible for a human woman to be the "Mother" of God. This seeming contradiction can be more easily understood if we say that Mary is the 'God-bearer', like the original Greek word. When we SAY, 'Mother of God', therefore, we are not saying that

Mary is the origin of the Godhead. We are saying that the one whom Mary bore is God. ITS AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE.

The real significance of this title - Mother of God - is not so much in what Mary is, as what Jesus is: God-Made-Man. Mary is called 'Mother of God' because her first-born son, Jesus of Nazareth, who was humanly born two thousand years ago, is really and truly God. Not 'God' in quote marks, not 'like God', or 'partly God'. He was, and is, and ever shall be God, the divine Son of the divine Father, the Word that proceeds eternally from the Father.

And that God, "*born of a woman, born under the law,*" as Saint Paul says in today's second reading, was a completely human child who was humanly born in Bethlehem, grew up and lived an AUTHENTIC human life, and died a REAL human death on a hill outside a town called Jerusalem.

Now - consider - if that child BORN TO MARY was not God, and if that man nailed to the cross was not God, and if the man who came out of the tomb and rose is not God, then THE FAITH WE PROFESS is meaningless and all of us gathered together reverently in this building is in vain. Without the historical truth of the birth to Mary – 'the God-bearer' - of the man who is God, then there is no Good News to be found in the Gospel.

The full meaning of 'Mother of God' is that THE HUMAN WOMAN Mary BORE THE DIVINE GOD, AND SHE gave to THIS omnipotent God the vulnerability of an AUTHENTIC human body which could suffer, die, and thereby save all humanity THROUGH HIS DIVINE RESURRECTION.

And so, we honor MARY today, because it was, she who gave us this man – IT WAS SHE WHO BORE this God - OUR Savior, Christ Our Lord.