

MARY, MOTHER

OF GOD

YEAR A, B, C.



FIRST READING

Numbers 6:22–27

PSALM

Psalms 67:2–8

SECOND READING

Galatians 4:4–7

GOSPEL

Luke 2:16–21

### Reading the Word

*First Reading: Numbers 6:22–27*

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

*Second Reading: Galatians 4:4–7*

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child,

and if a child then also an heir, through God.

*Gospel: Luke 2:16–21*

The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

### Prayer

*Psalms 67:2–8*

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

*Scripture quotations from  
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## Hearing the Word

### *"Channels of Blessing"*

A New Year, a new chapter in life, begins with the Church's celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. This is a deliberate choice because the Church celebrates the life of a person chosen as a channel through which God bestowed upon the world his greatest blessing – his Son and Saviour.

Blessing in the Scripture is never merely a wish; prayer is meant to confer a spiritual benefit. From the very beginning of the Old Testament, blessing concerned very concrete and essential aspects of human life in this world. The first blessing in the Bible is pronounced over the first human beings, when God "blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). This first and original blessing of humanity is, in fact, a command to bring forth life. Since God created all life, the blessing and command given to humanity is to continue God's creative activity in continuing to bring life into the world. This involves bearing children, but also care for God's creation in general. God is the author of life who entrusted human beings with being channels through whom God continues to give life to the world. From

then on, blessing in the biblical text continues to refer to those gifts of God which are necessary to create and support life. Thus, blessing means fertility, prosperity, security, and longevity. A blessed person lives a long life, surrounded by numerous children, secure in his or her own household. Blessing is something unmistakable and very visible, everybody recognises a blessed person. This is also the reason why, in biblical accounts, we frequently see individuals struggling to "get the blessing", such as in the stories of Jacob and Esau. They fight to receive the blessing of their father, because they know that the one blessed will carry on the family name, and will live a successful and meaningful life.

When, in the first reading, Aaron is given the command to bless the Israelites, the Lord God instructs him on the two essential aspects of blessing, namely that God be visible and gracious to the Israelites, and that God would give them peace. Both of these, God's presence and peace, are essential elements of a good life. To be blessed, in the biblical sense, means living a secure and prosperous life in God's presence. How can such blessing be attained? The second and the third readings provide the answer. God's blessing comes to humanity in the

fullest way through Jesus' presence and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the second reading, Paul explains that God sent his Son into the world for the sake of "adoption." Adoption means that believers become God's children; God becomes the Father whom believers can call "Abba". This intimate relationship is established by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Being guided by the Spirit means living in God's presence. Here, Paul alludes to the blessing of Aaron; when we live by the Spirit, the face of God shines upon us. The blessing that comes upon such a life means freedom from all that enslaves a human being; it means freedom to be God's children, not governed or possessed by anything or anybody else but God. This is true peace.

The Gospel narrates events surrounding Jesus' birth. Luke presents the meeting between the shepherds and Jesus' parents, with focus on Mary. When angels first appeared to the shepherds with the announcement of the Saviour's birth they declared, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" (Lk 2:14). They recognised that coming into the world, God's Son comes with a very real gift, the gift of peace.

Jesus is the bringer of peace which cannot be understood merely as an absence of war. Rather, it is the fullest expression of God's blessing working in the midst of humanity, which will be reconciled to God through his Son. Jesus brings harmony between God and humanity which the first parents lost when they committed the first sin.

Mary was instrumental in bringing Jesus into the world. Hearing the shepherds' proclamation, she reflects on what Jesus is to accomplish, and will support him in the mission of bringing peace into the world. Even though his life will not be without suffering, ultimately he will restore peace between God and humanity by shedding his blood on the cross (cf. Col 1:20). In the person of Jesus, blessing and peace become one because together they describe harmony between God and humanity, and within humanity itself. Rightfully, when the Church celebrates Mary the Mother of God – the mother of the bringer of peace – it also celebrates the World Day of Peace.

The Liturgy with which believers begin the New Year focuses on God's greatest blessing. The first parents were given the blessing and command to fill the world with life. Thus,

they were entrusted with the mission of channelling God's fundamental blessing, that is life itself, to this world. Paul taught that the Holy Spirit allows "God's face to shine upon us", as in Aaron's blessing. Here, the Holy Spirit is presented as the channel that brings God's presence into the midst of the community of believers. Jesus, the bringer of peace, fulfils another part of Aaron's blessing – "may the Lord give you peace". He taught humanity how to live a truly humane life, the life that can bring the blessing of peace into the human community, the blessing which shows itself in living the secure and prosperous life for which God created humanity.

Mary becomes the channel of God's greatest blessing when she willingly offers her life and body to bring Jesus into the world. She became not only the mother of God, but also the Mother of Peace. Christians, the descendants of the first parents and spiritual children of Mary, themselves become the channels of blessing when they live in God's presence, continually praying with the Psalmist, "may God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations."

## Listening to the Word of God

God created us as relational beings meant to enjoy the fullness of life through our relationship with God, others and creation. This is the state of blessedness and peace. Think for a moment about your experiences of joy, peace, loss, sadness and love. All of these moments are usually connected to our spiritual, personal and social relationships. We know from a personal experience that when our relationships with our families, friends and communities are harmonious we experience peace and joy.

At the social level when there is justice, equal distribution of resources, freedom, care for the environment and good governance there is peace. Peace, therefore, is not just the absence of war or conflict but the presence of everything that promotes the flourishing of life. When there is conflict in our relationships at both personal and social levels, restoring peace is very difficult. In many cases it takes an outside person who is committed to peace, impartial and desiring the best for all concerned, to be a mediator or a channel of peace. The mediator is often able to help the parties concerned to see the source of the conflict so that they can confront it

and restore peace and harmony.

Those who mediate peace, whether between friends, family or even nations, must be lovers of peace and truth, which can make them unpopular. In some cases, particularly in conflict situations, those who struggle for peace and justice face threats and dangers to their lives. Some have died without achieving their dreams, but their efforts have in the long run contributed to bringing peace. We can think of many in our national histories. Similarly, Christmas teaches us about loving God who loves humanity and identifies the conflict between human beings as primarily rooted in their broken relationships with God and each other. Two mediators become part of God's loving intervention, namely the Virgin Mary who offers her life to be the mother of Jesus, and Jesus himself who comes as the incarnation of God: that is God with us. Sacrifice and love characterize both the lives of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus, who become the channels of God's peace to humanity. Through their sacrifice a way has been opened for us to heal our broken relationship with God. This is the first step to healing our broken relationships with ourselves, others in our homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods,

communities, countries and in the world. As we experience the healing power of restored relationships and peace, we become channels of peace to the world following the path of Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

### Proverb

“Peace is  
costly  
but it is  
worth  
the ex-  
pense.”

### Action

#### Self-examination

Reflect on conflicts in your life where there are broken relationships and lack of peace, starting with your relationship with God and then relationships with others. What are the reasons for this brokenness?

Am I a peacemaker or a troublemaker? What can I do to be a channel of peace?

### Response to God

God has an open door policy and has shown willingness to love you and be at peace with you at all cost – even the cost of the life of Jesus. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for this love and grace that forgives our sins and restores our relationship with God.

### Response to your World

Resolve to take one action that will restore a relationship in your life that has been broken. Are there any conflicts in the midst of your group? If so, discuss the ways to move beyond conflict.

### Prayer

Dear Lord, I thank for all your blessings bestowed upon me, as I pray with Mary:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.