

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
DECEMBER 31, 2011 / JANUARY 1, 2012

Today's Gospel passage tells the Christmas story proclaimed at the second of the three Masses assigned to Christmas Day, the "Mass at Dawn" traditionally named "The Shepherds' Mass" with the added detail of the ritual naming and circumcision of Jesus in accordance with Jewish religious law in regard to male children on the on the eighth day following birth. Thus its choice for today's Mass.

In light of all that had happened to her so far in her life, St. Luke tells us that Mary "kept all these things reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19). Alternate translations state that she "pondered" them. The transitive verb "ponder" is defined as to "weigh mentally; think deeply about; consider carefully; meditate." As her life of intimate union with her Son Jesus continued to unfold, Mary often needed to reflect/ponder; search for and listen to the voice and will of God through them. It has been said that the non-reflected life is life lived only on the surface, a moving from event to event without purpose or direction. The truly full life, on the other hand, is one in which space is purposely carved out for reflecting/pondering, evaluating what has happened, taking stock of where one is at a given moment in life's journey; listening with the heart to where one is being called to go next. In our time and culture, it seems to me, that if we have not completely lost it, we are in danger of losing this essential dimension to life in general, and equally in our lives of faith as disciples of Jesus. We lived in a "wired" world. Many of us simply cannot go anywhere without our technological communication devices. Walk through an airport, a mall, or down the street and notice the people talking and texting even, I have observed here in church in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament or during the celebration of Mass! Ask a group of people to turn off their devices or check them in at a place for safe keeping while attending or participating in another activity and witness the "withdrawal" pains; for some similar in small or not small ways to trying to kick some other form of addictive behavior!

Today, New Year's Day, we traditionally make some "resolution", some plan to improve our life over the course of the next twelve months. I'd like to suggest we give some thought to integrating (if we are not already doing it) time set aside daily, weekly, or some extended time such as a retreat or renewal experience like a Christian Experience Weekend (CEW) for the explicit purpose of "turning off" the noise and activity that fills so much of our daily lives and "tuning in" to the presence and voice of God through an engagement in an act of deliberate reflection/pondering.

For Mary, and for us, the mystery of God's love and Christ's presence in our lives is so deep a mystery that we cannot grasp its full meaning just from reading the gospels (or dare I say) listening to a homily each weekend! We can only begin to grasp it when we, like Mary, take all the wondrous things God has shown us and done for us and reflect on them silently in our hearts. Today's feast reminds us that the Christmas mystery of God become flesh in time and now through the Spirit in each of us is an ongoing mystery in our lives and only by a conscious choice to set aside time to reflect on it can we, in turn, receive, accept and act on it. Mary's utter openness, acceptance, and reflection on it, was the result of a deliberate choice that enabled her to give room and time to God. Mary's reflective heart allowed her to integrate what she saw and heard; the joyful, the challenging, and the heartbreaking, into her daily life of discipleship. Her example models for us how we, too, can recognize the Word made flesh and dwelling in and among us.

No circumstances of our lives are beyond the touch of God, beyond where God can be, beyond God's saving action on our behalf. We too must give room and time to God. We too must learn a posture of reflective openness so that we can be attentive in differing times and places, through many people and circumstances, and through easy and difficult times to God's abiding Presence.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, the grace of a reflective heart in the new year that opens before us today, so that, like you, we may follow Jesus your son in complete faith and by our words and action bring him to birth through his Spirit dwelling within us to every person we encounter each day. Amen.