

## Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God: Devotion to Mary

On this the octave day of Christmas, we are called by the Church to take a deeper look at the mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord.

First of all, we use that word, *incarnation*, quite often, but we priests often fail to explain what the word means. Incarnation means taking on flesh. *Carne* is the Latin root word for flesh. A carnivore eats meat, right. When we say, "The Word became flesh," we are saying the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word, was incarnated. When did the Incarnation take place—when Mary conceived the child or when the child was born? The ancients were not concerned with the difference between the two events. For them the incarnation was one event and the Word was present as a child within Mary during her pregnancy. The Eternal Word of God became present when Mary agreed to what the angel asked, "Be it done unto me according to your word." Christmas celebrates the birth of the Word that became flesh within Mary.

The title of today's feast, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, also needs to be explained. Mary was a human being, a human being conceived without sin, but still a human being. But when we say the Hail Mary, we pray, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen." Why? Why does she, a human, hold the title of Mother of God?

To answer this we have to consider both the *What* and the *Who* of her son. *What* her son is, and *Who* her son is. The *what* question refers to nature. If a flying saucer landed and a slimy little green creature got out, I'd ask, "What are you?" Maybe, he'd say, "A Martian." Anyway, he might then say to me, "What are you?" and I would say, "A human being." If he pointed to Fido and asked, "What is that?" I'd say, "A dog." Now, if we were to ask, "What is Jesus Christ?" it would be insufficient to say, "A man" and it would be insufficient to say, "God." The correct answer would be: He is two, God and man. That is what we mean when we say Jesus has a human nature and a divine nature.

Now, let's go back to that flying saucer. If the slimy green guy, asked me, "Who are you?" I would have to answer, Joseph Pellegrino. If I were to ask him, "Who are you?", the slimy green guy would answer something like, "I'm Ming from Mongo." If we were to ask, "Who is Jesus?" the correct answer is "the Second Person of the Holy Trinity." The Eternal Word of God did not cease being Who He Is after the incarnation. That is why we say, Mary is the Mother of God. So, as far as nature, what is concerned, Mary is the mother of the human nature of the Lord. As far as person is concerned, who she is mother of, Mary is the mother of the one Divine Person of the Lord. That is why we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God."

Our little excursion into basic Christian theology leads us to a deeper understanding of Mary's holiness. She was so holy that the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and the Second Person of the Divine Trinity took flesh through her body. St. Paul

put it very simply in this way to the Galatians, today's second reading, "God sent His Son, born of a woman."

We Catholics still suffer the attacks of anti-Catholic bigots who claim that we worship Mary. Of course, we don't worship Mary. At the same time, we are not going to tone down the Christian belief that Mary is Mother of God. She is not just another one of the saints, the holy ones, she is the best of them, and the best of us. Mary is the Mother of God. The technical term for our reverence for the saints is *dulia*. The term that describes our reverence for Mary is *hyperdulia*. This is infinitely less than the reverence we owe God. The reverence we owe God is adoration.

Mary is not just the Mother of God. She is our mother. On the cross Jesus gave her to us. Yes, we dialogue with the Lord, we pray to Jesus. But we also pray to our Mother Mary asking her to intercede with her son for us. Jesus entrusted Mary to us to be our mother. Why then, shouldn't we call upon her to intercede for us with her son. That is why we say, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen."

Did the shepherd comprehend what they had seen in that stable. Did they understand who the child in the manger was? Perhaps not in the theological terms of nature and person, but they did understand this: God had touched humanity in a wonderful way. They left glorifying and praising the God who loves us so much.

How much does our God love us? He loves us so much that he became one of us through Mary. He loves us so much that He suffered and died for us. He loves us so much that he gave us this holy one, his mother, to be our mother.