

Notes for 01-01-10

Numbers 6:22-27 - The Lord bless you and keep you!

Gal. 4:4-7 - God sent his son, born of a woman.

Luke 2:15-21 - And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

To those of us who took in Catholic dogma with our mother's milk, the name of our feast today, 'Mary the Mother of God,' doesn't exactly make us stand up and shout "Blasphemy!" When we hear that phrase, we don't rend our garments and look for the nearest stake for burning the heretics. But it wasn't always that way among Christians. There were some who were so offended at the use of the epithets "Mother of God" and "God Bearer" that the Council of Ephesus was convened in 341 to debate the issue. The council's decision that "Mother of God" does properly and appropriately apply to the Blessed Virgin Mary caused the first early major schism in orthodox Christianity. The group that didn't approve of this term became known in the West as "The Nestorians." Today they are known as the Assyrian Church of the East, and ironically, they are closer to full communion with the Roman Catholic Church now than the Greek Orthodox. Sometimes it just takes awhile for us to get over our family quarrels and be reconciled, doesn't it?

The Christmas season is a joyful time of family get-togethers and gift-giving, singing carols and eating too much sugary food. Or, at least it is supposed to be. Christmas has been jollified and ho-ho-hoed so much that a lot of people are more likely suffer from depression now than at any other time of the year. Much of the time we do not experience the archetypal merriment of Merry Christmas. Oftentimes the reason is that there are family members who are estranged from us, people that minimally we just don't like, and in the worst case, we no longer speak to. So what are we to do?

On my first Alternative Spring Break trip to New Orleans with 20 University of Utah students, we stayed in a Dominican Priory right on Canal Street. Before hurricane Katrina about 20 friars lived there, but in that first Spring after Katrina only the Pastor and the campus minister of Tulane were living there at the time -- the rest still had not returned to

New Orleans. In the friars' common room where we had our daily meetings we found a vinyl LP of the "Let It Be" Beatles' album. As a result of listening to this album every night, the song, "Let It Be," became our theme song for the trip. Even today, when I hear the first lines of that song, it nearly brings tears to my eyes - especially the phrase, "Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, 'Let it be'." Most of our students from Utah had never been to a place so culturally Catholic as New Orleans. Maybe that is part of the reason why this song spoke to us so much. But I believe another reason is because of the context of the words, "Let it be" in our Lady's response to the Angel Gabriel's annunciation: "let it be done to me according to your word." So what are we to do with those un-reconciled relationships in our lives? Let it be. Not, "Let it alone". Not "ignore it". But "Let it be done according to your will for me, O Lord."

Let's stop rehearsing the hurtful words and the terrible deeds done that have caused us heart-ache and grief, and let them be. They are what they are. But life is short and precious. Who really has time to waste nursing psychic wounds and wounded pride? The greatness of Mary the Mother of God lay in her simplicity, her humility, and her transparency. This is not the same as passivity or callous indifference. No, as we heard in the Gospel, "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." In Mary, the still and placid waters ran deep.

Let's face the coming year with a greater willingness to accept the Divine Providence, to accept what is with utter realism, and live accordingly. Let's live our own "Let It Be.", But our "Let it Be" must not be simply a passive thing, but a welcoming, active acceptance of what truly is the case. Surely it is better to live in response to the truth, rather than to be wasting our lives reacting to false scenarios in our selfish hearts. "Let it be," and when the time is right, reach out.

And so, may Mary, our Blessed Mother and Mother of God pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death.