

Fr. John's Homily for January 1, 2023, Mary, the Holy Mother of God

JMJ CHS

I had a very interesting week. I spent a lot of time sitting in airports and on airplanes and so, in my many spare moments, I began to assemble some thoughts for a homily for when I would return this weekend, the feast day of Mary. *Mary, the Mother of God*.

Now I knew that Mary Anne Bastian, our Director of Religious Education, had agreed to do the bulletin article for this weekend, but I didn't expect that she would steal all my lines. She said all the things I wanted to say. You know, she has been taking classes at Sacred Heart Seminary so she's just bubbling over with all this new theological stuff and she used some of it in her article. But the point is, I had to start from scratch.

So then: Last week, at the Vigil Mass, which is the children's Mass, I recited a long list of the titles of Jesus – there are about 50 and so I gave it my best shot; *Wonder counselor; God hero; Father forever; Prince of Peace; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Alpha and the Omega; the Beginning and the End; the Lamb of God; the Good Shepherd; Emmanuel; the Living Bread come down from Heaven; the Son of God; the Son of Mary (and Joseph); the Son of David; the Son of Man; the Lion of Judah;* and perhaps the biggest and most important title of all, the very first title of God, given by God himself, to Moses, on Mount Sinai: *I AM* (Exodus 3-14). Everyone of those titles of Jesus is biblical. That is, they came to us by way of the sacred scriptures, beginning in the Old Testament which spoke of Him way before He actually came into this world.

Now today, on this feast of *Mary, the Holy Mother of God*, we can also speak of her many titles. But they do *not* come from the Bible – they are titles bestowed on her by the Church down through these 2000 years. Many of them are listed in something called, *The Litany of Loreto*. Some examples: *Mary, Mother of Hope; Virgin most powerful; Mirror of Justice; Cause of our Joy; Mystical Rose; Tower of David; Morning Star; Queen of Angels; Queen of Prophets; Queen of Apostles; Queen of Families; Queen of Peace;* and my personal favorite, *Mary, Ark of the Covenant*. But there are other titles that have emerged over the years. *Mary, Mother of the Priesthood*. This title probably had its origins on the first Pentecost. Our Parish icon in the back of the Church shows Mary at the center of those first priests. She's mothering them.

How about Mary as *Stella Maris*, that is, *Our Lady, Star of the Sea*? And then of course there are many titles of Mary from her apparitions. *Our Lady of Guadalupe; Our Lady of the Miraculous medal; Our Lady of Lourdes; and Our Lady of Fatima*. But then, of course, there is that one exception, that other very special title not in the Litany of Loreto, but given to St. Bernadette at Lourdes, by the Virgin herself, when she said, "*I am.....The Immaculate Conception*".

To digress a bit, when I was down in Houston last week my cousin Bev told me about another title of Mary as *Our Lady of Walsingham*. This was an apparition that came out of England in 1061, which then was Catholic England many years before Henry VIII separated from Rome and started the Church of England, or the Anglican Church, and began persecuting the local Catholics.

There is an *Our Lady of Walsingham* congregation in Houston which up until a few years ago was Anglican. But many Anglicans world-wide were beginning to get upset with their church because, well, they were getting kind of progressive. They were ordaining women bishops and LGBT priests. So they petitioned Rome for a little assistance. Can we become Catholics? Will you accommodate us?

Pope Benedict said yes. Today is the anniversary of that promulgation on January 1, 2012. So it is a very special day for the folks down in Houston at their new cathedral, named after our Lady.

The only title of Mary that I think is biblical came from the Gospel of Luke when the angel Gabriel visited her in Nazareth. *The Annunciation*. Many translations say, "*Hail Mary, full of grace*". Now that could be understood as a condition, or a characteristic of her being. But it could also be seen as a title, as in, "*Hail, full of grace!*" Another way of saying "Hello, Immaculate Conception"

Now just as the words *I AM* represent the highest and most important title of Jesus, Mary has a most important title as well. It is actually the very first title in the Litany of Loreto: *Mary, Holy Mother of God*. The title we celebrate today on this first day of the year. Kind of pride-of-place for this special title of the Blessed Mother.

Now at this point, I could direct you to read Mary Anne's article to fill in all those interesting details about how this title came about. Nevertheless, I am going to give you a very basic statement that I think you should commit to memory so as to understand the importance of this title and how to defend it because it is, in fact, a controversial title. What you should know is that the Church bestowed this title because some confusion had crept into the early Church about whether or not Jesus was God.

It is that ole heresy called Arianism. Arius was a Catholic priest who was a bit confused and proclaimed that, well if you're a son of someone, you can't be equal to them – you have to be something less. Thus, Jesus is the son of God, but is not God himself. He was wrong, but he just about won the day. It was the famous Council of Nicaea that held on to the truth that Jesus, as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was *One in being with the Father*, and the Holy Spirit. Do you recognize those words? We will recite them shortly in our Nicene Creed as we do every Sunday. But the natural result of all of this was to address Mary as the Mother of Jesus, who is God, therefore, Mary is the Mother of God. Our DRE Mary Anne goes on further to describe the twofold nature of Christ, fully God and fully Man, but again, you can go to the bulletin and read it yourself.

So let's conclude this homily with a short reflection on the words of the Rosary, that prayer to Mary that we are so familiar with. The very first mystery, The Annunciation, begins with those words spoken by the angel Gabriel. "*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.*" The second stanza contains the words spoken by Elizabeth at the *Visitation*, "*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*" And then she goes on to say something else very important, a question, "And how is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth now knew of Mary's new role: Mother of my Lord; Mother of my God. The last part of the Hail Mary was added by the Church. The most important part of the prayer where we ask Mary's intercession for us at all the important moments of our lives. Please pray it with me as we invoke her help using that most important of all of her titles, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. AMEN."

~Fr. John