

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On this first day of the New Year, I invite you to reflect with me on one small verse in today's Gospel text: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." I am not sure that even Mothers appreciate the depth of love that is in their hearts for their children.

As she looked on her new-born son, Mary already had so much on which to reflect—the visit of the angel announcing God's request; her sudden and unexpected pregnancy; the greeting of Elizabeth; the gracious acceptance and support of Joseph; the journey to Bethlehem; the excruciating pain of giving birth in a cold, damp, dank stable, inhabited by animals; her first look at her new-born son that told her, "Yes, she was looking on the face of God"; the love that welled up in her heart like waves crashing on the shore and her tears of joy rushing to join them; the visit of shepherds telling of angels visiting and angelic choruses singing; the gifts brought by three strangers, speaking foreign tongues, bowing to greet her child. And her heart exploded again and again with wondrous love for her child.

Too soon new realities presented themselves to reflect upon: Joseph telling her the child was in danger, Herod was coming to kill him; the flight into Egypt, refugees in a foreign land with people speaking a language she didn't understand, with customs which were unfamiliar; the eventual journey home, but not really home, to a place, Nazareth, unknown to her, but necessary to protect her child; all with a heart, fiercely protective with a love as strong as a lioness protecting her cub.

What followed was the pride of watching her son grow through the various stages of his life from infancy to boyhood to adolescence to manhood, and the joy of teaching him life's many lessons that would serve him well all along the way. She would reflect on each of these stages of her life with him with the pride and joy that a Mother experiences as her child grows and becomes the man God intended him to be.

Surely the heartaches beyond our imagining would come. But, then, in the beginning, no, Mary did not know that her Baby Boy would one day walk on water or that he would save our sons and daughters. No, she did not know that he would give sight to a blind man or calm the stormy sea or make the deaf hear and the dead rise. No, she had no idea that he would one day rule the nations from the throne of a criminal's cross with a crown of prickly thorns. That would all come much later.

But what would sustain her in all that would follow was a love so sublime that nothing could quench it.

When this Baby whose birth we celebrate would in a short few years on earth look down from that terrible Cross and say to his Mother, "Woman, behold, your son," and to his disciple, John, "Behold, your Mother," He gave her to us as our Mother too.

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, please believe and understand that she loves you and me with that same sublime love with which she loves Jesus. She protects us with the same fierceness with which she protected him. She takes as great pride in our growth and success as she did his. She seeks to comfort us in our sorrows, failures, and brokenness, with the same gentleness with which she bathed his wounds as she prepared him for burial. And she intercedes for us constantly with her risen son on our behalf, especially when we make a mess of our lives.

Yes, today we celebrate her today as the Mother of God, but as our Mother too. Rejoicing in the gift of her Motherhood, may we also give thanks to our own birth and adoptive Mothers who have poured that same sublime love into us.

Please may we also recognize that we are especially blessed to live as a Church Family under her patronage. She is Our Lady of Consolation. Pray to her daily, asking her intercession, because she is always here for you, as she is still always there for and with Jesus.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!