

## Our “Salve”-ation

Homily for January 1<sup>st</sup> 2023  
Mary Mother of God

In the reading we heard from Galatians, St Paul summarizes in a few verses the whole of God’s saving plan whereby God enters into the story of our lives that has Jesus at the centre. Listen again to how St. Paul states this:

***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children<sup>1</sup>***

The fullness of time implies there was a long passage of time that preceded the fullness of time. From a biblical perspective this would be the whole of the story as contained in the Hebrew Bible. Everything from Genesis, the First Book of the Hebrew Scriptures, through to Malachi, the forty third book, points forward to the fullness of time of which St. Paul refers to in today’s reading. But notice something about this text, he says that the “Son was sent” – this implies Jesus’ divine nature, and was “born of a woman”, this speaks of his human nature to those who were under the law. What does this mean? The Law as contained in the Old Testament teaches us that we are in need of the physician Jesus Christ, to redeem us, or we could say to heal us of sin. This is after all the meaning of the word “salvation”. What is a salve? It is an ointment we put on a wound the help facilitate the healing. This is what Jesus does in the life of those who believe there is the wound, called Sin for which Jesus is the remedy, our *salve*-ation.

Think about what St. Paul is saying this way:

The reason for the Incarnation, the reason for God becoming man, the reason for Christmas, is to rescue us from the punishments we deserve by God’s law. The law is good, and holy, and perfect, but it does not save us; it condemns us as sinners. The law is not our healing operation, our “good news,” it is the “bad news” of our accurate x-ray. The Good News is that because of what Christ did for us God forgives us and adopts us as his children, so that we can now call God “our Father.” In the early Church, new converts were not allowed to pray the Our Father until after they were baptized, because baptism made them God’s children and made God their Father. We are no longer servants but sons and daughters of God, not because we earned it but because God gave it.<sup>2</sup> That’s the point of the Christmas Baby... Jesus is the Gift that keeps on giving!!!!

This is also the theme at the centre of today’s Mass. We celebrate Jesus entered fully into our human nature because Mary gave her “yes” to becoming the Mother of God. For the remedy

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Ga 4:4–5). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> ***Kreeft, Peter. Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle A) (p. 158). Kindle Edition.***

requires a divine intervention because at the heart of the problem is that we are soul sick. The soul is that dimension of our being that is eternal, and therefore needs the one who is eternal to heal it. And what does today's Mass say about this divine healer? Listen again to the reading from Numbers 6:

*The LORD bless you and keep you;  
<sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
<sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.<sup>3</sup>*

Do you know what this prayer is basically saying? Right here in the heart of that part of the Old Testament that we call the Law, the X-ray - the priest is saying that God doesn't look on us as a harsh critic ready to condemn us, to right us off, to say your terminal there is not cure, no hope. No he looks at us as father who truly loves us, sees our illness and is smiling upon us because he wants to heal us. He is the Father who heals through the loving intervention of his Son, and by the Holy Spirit extends his healing presence through time and into eternity.

That is the faith that God invites us to have when we hear and pray this prayer: the faith in God's smile, the faith in God's love and goodwill and benevolence and blessing and gift and grace. "Grace" means gifts that we do not deserve; "grace" means "unmerited favor." All the saints say that God's grace is always greater than we can imagine and greater than all our sins. Our sins are much greater than we think, but God's grace is infinitely greater than we think.<sup>4</sup>

When we come to know that we are children loved by the Father, because we are being healed with the salve that is His mercy and love, then in turn we can look to Mary, the Mother of God, who knew fully who she was and lived with trusting confidence in God's goodness.

As we think of what it means to consider that in Jesus God is smiling upon us, I want to highlight one thing from today's Gospel. Upon the arrival of the Shepherds St Luke tells us of the Mother of God:

*Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart<sup>5</sup>*

What was Mary treasuring and pondering. All that had taken place at that first Christmas. She knew the smile of God.

So what does it mean for us to treasure and ponder?

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Nu 6:24–26). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle A)* (p. 155). Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Lk 2:19). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

It's more than just thinking about and reflecting on the Christmas story and our story. Treasuring means thinking about this story of our salvation a divine gift, as parts of the perfect Providence of an all-wise and all-loving God. It means thanking God for these events, and the events of our lives, trying to discern his will for you in them, and trying to obey that will, even when you don't understand the things that happen, and even when they look dark rather than light, even when they are sufferings rather than joys. Nothing happens to us outside God's plan. We're not responsible for that plan, because we're not God; but we are responsible for our own choices, because we are human beings with free will.

What does "pondering" add to "thinking"? Depth. And patience. Most of the most important things in life take time and patience to understand, like the three most important choices we make: what God to believe in and what person to marry and what career to work at. Patience is necessary especially with people: you can't understand other people, or even yourself, without patience and experience. It's not like math or technology, with formulas and machines that give you instant answers. In all the most important areas of life, truth comes gradually, like the tides, or the sunrise, not instantly, as it does when you just press a key or flip a switch.

In 2023 may we follow the lead of Mary and spend more time "pondering." And we all can do it. You don't have to be a genius or an "intellectual" or a contemplative monk to "ponder." You just have to care about finding the truth, finding the light.

Mary pondered in her heart, the text says, not just in her head. Your intuitive heart is profounder than your rational head, even though it's not as clear. And it's your heart, and its love of truth, that moves your head to look, and keep looking. The passionate, honest, persistent love of truth is the very best way to find it.<sup>6</sup>

Mary did this her whole life - the only woman who is the Mother of God.

When we live with this kind of Marian perspective on life we will by grace discover that we are daughters and sons of the Father who is lovingly smiling upon us. This leads to the healing of our souls, for this is our salvation.

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<sup>6</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle A)* (p. 163). Kindle Edition.