

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – January 1, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 10:00am Mass – 550 words

Our civil New Year falls on the eighth day after Christmas, what we call the “octave day” of Christmas in the Church. And as we heard in our gospel just now, this is the day that Mary and Joseph formally named Jesus, in fulfillment of the requirements of the law. They gave him the name that the angel had assigned before he was conceived, that name which means “savior”. On every new year we recall this event, and indeed, in the Church we speak of each year as the “year of the Lord”: a year of salvation, a year of grace.

We begin the new year by honoring in a particular way the Mother of God. Christ the Lord came into this world through her, and we wish to enter into this new year of the Lord through her as well. We pray that, just as she fulfilled the requirements of the law with great care, so she may help us to do the same, so that we might grow more fully into the likeness of her Son. The Church sets the Blessed Mother before us on so many feast days as the model of Christian life for us to follow. May we indeed follow her more closely.

One of the ways that we may do so is by imitating what we see her doing in the gospel: “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”, it said. That word “reflecting” could also be translated from the Greek as “putting together”, like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. And isn’t our life so often like a puzzle? Sometimes a very difficult one! We need to stop and reflect. We need to try to put the pieces together more often, to recognize how God is at work. This is what our Blessed Mother always did.

A more serious life of prayer will certainly help us carry out any other resolutions we might make for this new year. But our own projects aside, a more serious life of prayer will also help us to understand more fully what the Lord’s project for us is – and this is the most important project we could ever pursue. Remember the scene of Martha and Mary in the gospel; Mary chose the better part, listening at the feet of the Lord and meditating on his words; she chose the “one thing necessary”. If only we could get our priorities in order and pursue that most necessary thing first each day this year, we might live out 2017 truly as a “year of the Lord”, a year in which he actively guides us in ways that we had not previously experienced.

So I leave you with a question: What are the concrete ways that you will pursue a more serious life of prayer in this new year? How will you imitate our Blessed Mother, who “kept all...things, reflecting on them in her heart”? And I conclude with the blessing from the first reading, for we certainly need God’s help in order to answer this question and then put our answer into action: “The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!”. Amen.