

It is evident, when we look around, that this Basilica has a deep affection for Mary, Mother of God. We have a number of images, windows and statues of her. Each day the church is aglow from the candles lit before her statue signifying the prayers offered to God through her intercession. She is depicted here as Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, as a child with her mother Ann, there are windows showing us the Annunciation, the Holy Family and Visitation. Each week we pray to her as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Mother of Perpetual Help. We can only imagine, through the years, the requests that she has heard in this church alone; for children, parents, spouses, siblings and friends; for health and special intentions, for peace of heart and for a hoped-for miracle.

As we turn the page on yet another year, we look back at the one that has passed and ahead to the one that has yet to begin. And with some satisfaction each of us can say, we survived! After two years of restrictions, families and friends came together at Christmas. Here in this Basilica, babies were baptized, adults were received into full communion, couples were married, relatives and friends gathered to pray for a loved one gone home to the Lord. In our homes we have heat, the lights are on, and although more expensive, there is food on our plates. On the other hand, there is the war in Ukraine, inflation, strains on our health care system, we are all a year older, there are still bad people in charge in various countries in the world, the Senators don't seem to much better and it appears we still don't listen to one another very well.

As has been the case in the past, people will stay up past their bed time to say good bye to one year and welcome another. There always seems to be this sense of hope for a better world, peace, and less bad news. We who gather here place our trust not on fate, but on God. For we have confidence that God will continue to love the world by continuing to pour out His grace to help make the world the place that God has planned from the very beginning.

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, celebrates the unique role she plays in our salvation, which is emphasized in a special way during the Christmas Season. A few years ago Peter Wehner wrote in the New York Times: Christmas is meaningful, for those of us of the Christian faith, because it situates each of our lives; the joys and sorrows, the hope and despair, the dramatic and mundane; in a larger narrative: Not only did God author life; the Son of God became a person within it.

Like so much we do; this celebration offers a challenge. There is perhaps one word that sums up all the pictures, statues, prayers and devotions of and to Mary and it is encounter. Like Mary, we are invited to place ourselves in an encounter with God, confident we are loved and blessed.

Pope Benedict once said that one of the most amazing features of Mary is she never placed herself at the centre, instead she always left space for God. She did that by pondering in her heart – bringing the pieces of her life together.

We cannot encounter God unless we make room for God. As we begin another year perhaps that is what Mary is saying to us: leave space for God.