

Homily for the Feast of the Mother of God January 1, 2023

Some of you may be of an age to remember a popular daytime television of years past called “Kids Say the Darndest Things”. It was hosted by the genial Art Linkletter. In each episode of the show Linkletter would chat with a select group of children. In one humorous exchange, he asked a young boy if he looked like his father or his mother. After a momentary pause, the boy shouted. “I look like the mailman”.

Art Linkletter chuckled.

The boy’s mother was understandably embarrassed.

Scripture is silent on the physical attributes of Jesus. But the later Fathers of the Church surmised with reason that Jesus, since he had no human father, physically resembled his holy mother. Even more significantly, the mother of Jesus resembled her Divine son in the purity of her noble soul and the extraordinary witness of her life.

In one of his sermons, the nineteenth century English convert to the Catholic Church and scholar, John Henry Cardinal Newman, writes, “Now when we turn to the gospels I think everyone must feel some surprise that we are not told more about the Blessed virgin than we find there. After the circumstances of Christ’s birth and infancy, we hear little of her”

Newman was of the view that in the silence we find instruction.

“Scripture was written not to exalt that particular saint, but to give glory to Almighty God”.

While it is true that Mary has inspired more great art than any other woman in history, her divine son remains the central focus in so many of the sacred images in which Mary is depicted. In many of the earliest paintings and icons we see Mary pointing to or gazing upon her child. The resemblance between mother and child is not without significance. Like mother, like son.

The late Bishop Fulton Sheen once wrote that Mary is like the moon, for her light is always a reflection of a higher light.

Jesus did not have a human father. Mary conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit and for this reason Jesus is called the Son of God. Mary is the “Theotokos”, a word in Greek which means, “The one who gave birth to the one who is God” It is through Mary that the Son of God is united to the human race. Mary is the mother of the creator.

It is a deep and profound mystery.

In today’s gospel Mary is presented as one who contemplates the stunning and unexpected good news of Our Savior’s birth. Luke tells us that after the shepherds had made known to her the message of the shepherds, “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).

In receiving our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion, each one of us is a holy dwelling place for God. We are God’s tabernacle, His abode.

Regrettably, receiving the sacrament has become routine for too many of the faithful. We have lost a sense of the sacred and fail to appreciate the marvel of our Lord coming to us in the sacrament of His body and blood.

In reflecting on Mary and the Church, Milton Walsh, a distinguished scholar, quotes a passage from the Second Vatican council’s document on the constitution of the Church, emphasizing the maternal role in “giving birth” to the faith in others.”

“By receiving the word of God in faith (the Church) becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the sons who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God.

“In a spiritual sense Christ “takes on” the humanity of each believer and comes to birth in each one of us. The same Holy Spirit who made Mary a mother while she remained a virgin descended upon the disciples at Pentecost to make the Church fruitful with new “Christs”.

Like her son, the Eternal Word of God, Mary was beautiful in every facet of her life. Mother and Son resembled each other.

What possible honor can be more sublime than the one afforded her by God Himself?

Rightly, the Church praises Mary, and will continue to do so in her liturgies and teachings. No other person who ever lived can claim to be God’s chosen instrument to all the Eternal Word to become flesh.