

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Nm 6:22-27; Ps 67:2-3,5,6,8; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2:16-21

JANUARY 1: THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, December 31, 2016, 5:00 and 7:30 p.m. Masses

Sunday, January 1, 2017, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

Today is the **8th** and **last day** of the **Octave of Christmas**.

It is **impossible** to **celebrate Christmas** in just **one day**.

It is far too great a feast.

The **8-day Octave began** on December 25th, **Christmas**, and focused on **Jesus** himself, and it **ends** on **January 1st**, today, with a special focus on his mother, **Mary**.

Spiritually, we are not beginning the New Year, we are ending the Octave.

There are **many ways** to **reflect** on the **importance of Mary**.

First and foremost, she gave birth to Jesus.

If we are going to celebrate the people of **Christmas**,

there are **two individuals** who deserve the **lion's share** of the **attention**:

the one who was born, **Jesus**,

and the one who gave birth, **Mary**.

Mary is most revered for the fact that she is the mother of Jesus (Lk 2:7)

and because Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 1:1; 15:39)

Mary is the **Holy Mother of God** (Gal 4:4).

Mary goes by **many different titles**.

The **best list** of her titles is in the **Litany of Mary**,

also called the Litany of Loretto.

Let's sample three of Mary's titles.

Mary is the "**Seat of Wisdom**."

We can all pray to Mary for insight, clarity, and guidance.

It is a perfect invocation for the beginning of a class or a meeting.

Mary is the "**Health of the Sick**."

Just think of how many people have gone to Lourdes in France,

or prayed to Mary at home or in the hospital for health and healing,

and all of the miraculous cures that have taken place.

Mary is the "**Queen of Victory**."

When I played high school basketball,

my basketball coach was a religious Brother,

and at the end of every timeout,

every time that we broke the huddle to go back on to the floor,

his last three words were, "Queen of Victory," and we shouted, "Pray for us."

Today the Vikings faithful can pray to Mary, Queen of Victory,

for special help in prevailing over the Chicago Bears.

The Litany of Mary **begins** and **ends** with her **two most important titles**.
The litany begins, “**Holy Mary, Mother of God,**”
and the litany ends, [Mary,] “**Queen of Peace.**”
The “**last word**” is that Mary, the Mother of God, is the **Queen of Peace**.

Why the **emphasis on peace**?

It all starts with **Jesus**, of course.

The newborn Emmanuel is the **Prince of Peace** (Is 9:5).

On Christmas night, the angels sang, “**Peace on earth**” (Lk 2:14).

When Jesus began his ministry, in his very first sermon,

he said, “**Blessed are the peacemakers**” (Mt 5:9).

After Jesus rose from the dead,

the first words out of his mouth were, “**Peace be with you**” (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19).

Jesus was all about **peace**, and if Jesus is about peace, **so is his mother Mary**.

Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) could see the **beautiful connection** between **son** and **mother**,
the **Prince of Peace** and the **Queen of Peace**,

so on January 1, 1968,

Pope Paul VI declared the Solemnity of Mary, today, to be the **World Day of Peace**.

Today we celebrate the fiftieth World Day of Peace.

For this occasion, **Pope Francis** wrote a **special letter on peace**

(*Nonviolence: a Style of Politics and Peace*) (*NSPP*).

It is not just directed to Catholics, but to all people of good will.

Pope Francis begins by enunciating an **underlying principle for peace**.

Every person is made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27).

Every person has dignity.

Every person is sacred and worthy of respect (*NSPP*, 1.1).

Pope Paul VI said, “**Peace is the only direction for human progress.**”

St. Pope John XXIII said **peace** is founded on “truth, justice, freedom and love” (*NSPP*, 1.2).

Jesus preached nonviolence.

When **people picked up stones** to kill a woman,

Jesus told them to **put their stones down** (Jn 8:5,7,9).

When **Peter** took out his **sword** and **cut off the high priest’s slaves ear**,

Jesus scolded Peter, “**Put your sword away**” (paraphrase, Mt 26:52) (*NSPP*, 3.1).

Jesus lived non-violence.

When he was treated violently, **Jesus did not retaliate at all** (see Is 53:7,8).

Jesus lived during the First Century under Roman rule, a time of terrible violence,

but he did not resort to violence himself.

Jesus is the **Prince of Peace** (Is 9:5).

Pope Francis, in his letter, **laments** the incredible amount of **violence in our world**.

He mentions World War I and World War II (*NSPP*, 2.1).

We could add Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Pope Francis goes on to **decry** what he calls “**piecemeal violence**,” **pervasive violence**: terrorism, organized crime, abuse, human trafficking (*NSPP*, 2.2).

We could add police shootings, the shootings of police, violent protests, gang warfare, the horrendous number of murders in Chicago, and assaults and rapes on our own university campuses.

We live under the **constant threat** of **nuclear disaster**.

Country after country spends **staggering amounts** of money on their **military** when these resources could be used for **peaceful purposes** (*NSPP*, 2.3).

And on this World Day of Peace, **Pope Francis asks**,

“**Where does this all lead?**”

“**Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value?**” (*NSPP*, 2.2).

History shows that violence leads to unspeakable death and loss, even for the so-called “winners.”

The **purpose** of the **World Day of Peace** is to have a **plan for peace**, and the **person who has the plan** is **Jesus**, the Prince of Peace (Is 9:5).

Jesus would not have us start at the Kremlin or the White House.

Jesus would have us **start with ourselves**.

The place where **violence begins** is in the **hearts** of **individual people** (*NSPP*, 3.1).

Jesus observed,

“**From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts**” (Mk 7:21).

When people **offend** us, **hurt** us, **oppose** us,

we become **angry**, and anger can easily lead to **violence**,

not just **physical** violence, but **emotional** and **verbal** violence.

St. Paul wisely advises, “**Do not let the sun set on your anger**” (Eph 4:26).

We all need to do **anger management** with ourselves.

We need to **dial down** our **anger**.

We need to **dial up** our **self-control** (Gal 5:23) and **charity** (1 Cor 13:4-7).

We must **resist** the **temptation** to **retaliate**.

If we claim that we are disciples of Jesus,

we have to rededicate ourselves to **do things the Jesus way**.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace,

and **each of us**, individually, needs to be a **prince** or **princess** of **peace**.

It begins in our hearts,

and it expresses itself in the way that we conduct our day-to-day affairs.

St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says that the **next most important place**

to focus on **nonviolence** and **peace** is in **our homes** (*NSPP*, 4.1).

Whether it is between husbands and wives, parents and children, or brothers and sisters, there is always going to be **friction**, **conflict**, and **hurts** (*NSPP*, 5.1).

Trouble at home is **inescapable**,
but **intimidation** and **force** is **never** a **meaningful** or **lasting** solution.

The **non-violent approach** to get through our troubles is
to **respect** each other,
dialogue, to **talk** to each other,
to show **concern** for the other person,
to have **mercy** in our hearts, and to extend our **forgiveness** (*NSPP*, 5.1).

St. Therese of Lisieux had a **pathway to peace** for the nuns in her convent.

She called it “**The Little Way**” (*NSPP*, 5.2),
small things – a smile, a friendly comment, a little good deed –
done with **exceptional kindness**.

There is a saying, “**Charity begins at home.**”
It is equally true that “**peace begins at home.**”

This all leads to **the bigger stage**.

The **basement level foundation** of **nonviolence** and **peace** is in **our hearts**.

The **second level** of the foundation is our **families** and **homes**.

Individuals and **families** build a **culture** of **nonviolence** and **peace** that extends to
in our schools, our churches,
our sports teams, our workplaces,
our neighborhoods, our nation, and the world.

Nonviolence is **not** about being **weak** or **submissive**.

It is **not** about being **wimpy** or **soft**.

It is **not** about **succumbing** to **evil**.

This requires great **courage** and **strength**,
fierce **determination** and **commitment**.

We **overcome evil** with **greater good**.

We **overcome hate** with **greater love**.

We **overcome injury** with **greater mercy**.

History has shown us that **nonviolence can prevail** over violence.

Mahatma Gandhi overcame in India.

Nelson Mandela overcame in South Africa.

Dr. Martin Luther King overcame in America.

Jesus wants us to **resist violence** in a **nonviolent way**.

Jesus wants **every man** to be a **prince of peace**
and **every woman** to be a **princess of peace**.

Today is the **fiftieth World Day of Peace**.

Let us **pray** through the **intercession** of **Mary**, the **Queen of Peace**,
that there will be **peace** in our **hearts**, peace in our **families**, and peace in the **world**.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with us.