

Circumcision of the Lord & Mary Theotokos
(Numbers 6:22-27 / Luke 2:16-21)
01.01.2022

Today we mark the first day of the calendar year. In Christian circles, from this day forth, many people will refer to the twelve months before us as constituting *The Year of the Lord 2022*. That phrase will be employed in many official decrees and documents issued by the Church, for example – and in certain civil societies which still have a strong Christian identity.

On this day, the Church has us celebrate the Solemnity of Mary *Theotokos*, *Mary the Mother of God*. That title reminds us that the child whom Mary bore in her flesh was none other than *God made man*. The title given to the mother does not so much focus on her as it would have us consider and appreciate the identity of the Child she bore. The Fathers of the Church spoke of *Mary Theotokos* – *Mary, Mother of God* – to make a strong Christological statement: to proclaim the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary. This feast has us contemplate and rejoice in the fact that divinity and humanity have come together in a unique way in the person of Jesus Christ. It has us acknowledge that God espoused our humanity in the person of Jesus in whom *He became man so that we humans might become God*. There are consequences to this for us.

Today we should bear in mind that the call addressed to all of us is to become *one with God*. To become one with God is to undergo the process of *divinisation*. The Fathers of the Church – both of the East and of the West – speak freely of our *divinisation*, insisting that *God became man so that man might become God*. I wonder if we as aware as we should be that our Christian vocation engages us to become well and truly *one with God*; that our Christian vocation calls upon us to be well and truly *divinised*. I see today's feast as providing us with an occasion to reflect upon our Christian calling in this light. The teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in article 460 touches on this whole question. What we read therein comes to my mind today. I quote: *The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature': 'For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become God.'* *'The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in His divinity, assumed our nature, so that He, made man, might make men gods.'* (What the Catechism presents us with there in that article amounts to a fine tapestry of Patristic quotations all woven together.)

In our Roman liturgy the notion of our *sharing in the divinity of Christ* is expressed in the prayer recited as the water is mingled with the wine during the preparation of the gifts to be brought to the altar for the Offertory of the Eucharist. These words are prayed at that moment by the one who adds the water to the wine: *By the mystery of the mingling of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.*

Something else is remembered on this Eighth Day after Christ's birth and that is the mystery of His Circumcision in the Temple. By the rite of His circumcision it was made manifest that Jesus' life belonged to God. What Jesus' circumcision – what this mark inscribed in His flesh – signified was that His life was God's life. The rite of circumcision signified this truth not only for Jesus, but for every male child in Judaism. This is still the case for Jewish males today. Circumcision brought home (and still brings home) to the whole People of Israel (both male and female members of God's People who see this distinctive mark on the bodies of their male members) their Covenant Bond with the Lord. Male Jews (and female Jews living sexual intimacy with their partners in love) would be/are reminded of their belonging to God's People. This sign should lead them to say to themselves and express to one another (especially in the

act of sexual union): *We are God's very own People, bound to Him and to each other by the gift of God's Covenant Bond of Love.*

Here again the idea of *oneness with the Lord*, communion with Him – and with each other in Him – was brought (and is still meant to be brought) to the forefront of the minds of God's People.

That same sense of *oneness with the Lord*, communion with Him, and with each other in Him, should be ever present in our minds and hearts, even though physical circumcision is not now an obligation for the *People of God of the New and Eternal Covenant* sealed by Christ which is now made with all those who confess Jesus as Lord, both Jews and Gentiles.

Very clearly in the New Testament, but already in the prophetic writings of the First Testament (especially in the Book of Jeremiah) what counts above all is *circumcision of the heart*. It is no longer simply a physical operation carried out upon the male population in their flesh that counts. Now what counts is the attitude of mind and heart of all God's People – both the male and female members of the Lord's Faithful.

To live the grace of *circumcision of the heart* is to be totally given to God. It is to be completely accorded to God's will – as Jesus was. *Christ-Jesus said coming into this world: Behold I come to do Your will.* Later on He could reiterate that by stating: *I do not My own will, but the will of the One who sent me.*

In a way that permitted Jesus' appearance on earth, Mary, the young girl of Nazareth, called to be His Mother – the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God – said clearly at the Annunciation: *Be it done to me in accordance with your word.*

Both Jesus and Mary show us how important our obedience to God's will is.

The call I hear to be addressed to all of us on the first day of this New Year – this Year of the Lord 2022 – is a call to live the stretch of time before us with and for the Lord. It is a call to live in obedience to the Lord's will for our lives. It is a call to recognise the truth of the words we will hear spoken at the beginning of the great Easter Vigil (in our Solemn Celebration of that Most Sacred Night in the course of this year 2022): *Christ Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One to whom belongs all time.*

On the first day of this civil calendar year may each of us take a quiet moment with the Lord – following the example of *Mary who quietly pondered the meaning of all things concerning Christ in her heart*. In our moment of heart to heart encounter with the Lord – a moment in which we savour the blessing of that sweet communion with Christ to which we are called – let us dare to say in all truth: *I am Yours, Lord. All time is Yours. I receive this year from You and commit myself to live it with You and for you.*

May the prayers of Mary the Mother of Jesus whom we are told *treasured all things concerning the Child in her heart* and who is shown in John's Gospel to have stayed with her Son to the end – living the challenge Simeon spoke of in Luke's Gospel at Christ's Presentation in the Temple, when the saintly old man foretold suffering would be part of Mary's maternal vocation – help all of us to remain in close communion with Christ always, in good days and in bad... until the very end.

Amen!