

MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

LECTIONARY #18

READING I Numbers 6:22-27

A reading from the Book of Numbers

The LORD said to Moses:

“Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them:

This is how you shall bless the Israelites.

Say to them:

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!

So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites,
and I will bless them.”

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8 (2a)

R. May God bless us in his mercy.

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth
fear him!

READING I Embedded in the story of the Lord’s saving actions, divine commands, and instructions is God’s instruction to Moses to teach the priests how to bless Israel. Likely one of the oldest poetic texts in the Old Testament, it retains a freshness and lasting appeal. The prayer is both individual and universal; the “you” as recipient of the blessing is singular, given to each person individually, as well as to the whole nation regarded as a single person.

The phrasing of the blessing is solemn as well as tender, announcing the Lord’s imparting of abundant favor that overflows

on those so blessed. Each time the name “Lord” (Yahweh) is mentioned, the people are reminded that it is the God of the covenant who blesses them, the God who acted with power in rescuing them from Egypt. After the verb that promises blessing, the next verb proclaims *how* God blesses: by the abiding action of guarding and protecting Israel. Since the people have already experienced God’s protective action in their desert sojourn, they can be confident that it will continue in the present and future.

The second line of the blessing, typical of Hebrew poetry, is almost synonymous

with the first. The image of God’s face shining upon the people portrays God’s blessing as personally enveloping them with radiant divine presence. God’s graciousness is the bestowal of abiding favor, and a sign of God’s fidelity. In looking kindly on Israel, the Lord will grant the gift of peace, *shalom*, the blessing of well-being in every dimension of life.

After the blessing prayer, God tells the priests to “invoke my name upon the Israelites.” With God’s name upon them, the people are to be identified as God’s

Galatians = guh-LAY-shuhnz

Pause after you proclaim, "Brothers and sisters." How blessed we are to be God's children! The tone in this reading is one of simple gratitude.

Keep up your energy.

Abba = AH-bah

Pause before you say "Abba, Father!" Use good eye contact as you end the reading.

Proclaim with energy in your voice.

Say this quietly.

READING II Galatians 4:4-7

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians

Brothers and sisters:

When the **fullness** of time had come, **God** sent his Son,
born of a woman, born under the law,
 to ransom those under the law,
 so that we might **receive adoption** as sons.

As proof that you are sons,
 God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
 crying out, "Abba, Father!"

So you are **no** longer a **slave** but a **son**,
 and if a **son** then also an heir, through God.

GOSPEL Luke 2:16-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

The **shepherds** went in **haste** to **Bethlehem** and found **Mary**
and Joseph,
 and the infant lying in the manger.

When they saw this,
 they made **known** the message
 that had been told them about this **child**.

All who heard it were amazed
 by what had been told them by the **shepherds**.

And **Mary** kept all these things,
 reflecting on them in her heart. >>

own possession, blessed, guarded, favored,
 and given the Lord's own peace.

READING II The context of the reading from Galatians is Paul's explanation that humanity had not yet reached adulthood. As minors, they were no better than slaves and remained under guardianship until the proper time. Then Paul announces the good news that the designated time has come. In the fullness of time, predetermined by God, humanity has come of age; they are no longer slaves but fully grown children.

This new status has come about because God sent his Son, born of a woman, into the world. In a few words, Paul proclaims the profound mystery of Jesus' identity as the divine Son of God and the fully human son of Mary. As one intimately related both to God and to humanity, Jesus' mission is to bring the immature, enslaved human race into mature relationship with God and into freedom. He does this by rescuing or redeeming us, and making us adopted sons and daughters. Like the designated redeemer in ancient Israel, Jesus acts as the closest relative with the

task of freeing family members from poverty, imprisonment, or slavery.

Having become adopted children through Jesus' redeeming action, we have received the gift of Christ's Spirit that God has sent into our hearts. Earlier in Galatians, Paul wrote that Christ lives in him (2:20). Whether speaking about Christ or the Spirit, Paul repeatedly affirms the divine indwelling in his very being and in that of believers. Because of that profound relationship that makes us God's sons and daughters, we can address God as did Jesus, "Abba." God is our ever-present