

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.”

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!

A reading built on advice that God gives to Moses. The verbs “speak,” “say,” and “invoke” are crucial, as are repetitions of “The Lord.” Use these repetitions to guide your proclamation.

Note how the word “bless” is repeated.

Note how “bless” echoes in “peace.”

For meditation and context:

READING I As part of the instructions given by the Lord to Moses on the construction of the Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus, chapters 28 and 29 are devoted to the consecration of priests and the design of the vestments that are to identify their duty as “Sacred to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36). Levitical priests made daily burnt offerings as a sign of Israel’s fidelity to the covenant. What is not made clear in Exodus is how priests are to relate to their fellow Israelites. Here in the Book of Numbers, which details Israel’s beginnings in the Promised Land, we see a glimpse of

the role priests now play with the people. They are to bless the people.

Blessings had long been a part of the Israelite tradition, as the annual Passover, as well as the keeping of the Sabbath, called for God’s name to be blessed. However, in this passage from Numbers, the role of blessing people is now reserved for priests, those who are the descendants of Aaron. Thus, we can see that the priesthood has expanded from the duty of performing daily sacrifice to strengthening the people’s relationship with the Lord by reminding them of how he cares for them.

Thus, this blessing prayer invokes the name of the Lord over the people three times, as the people learn of his care: first, keeping them as his possession; second, experiencing the graciousness of God’s face shining upon them; and third, receiving the gift of God’s kindness and peace. The closeness of God to his people is suggested in all three of these invocations, but especially in the second, for Moses saw the face of God and was forever transfigured. The people are not to see the Lord’s face, but they are certainly meant to radiate

A reading in which Paul connects the members of the early church in Galatia directly to Jesus. He does so in three sentences, introduced by "when," "as," and "so." In short order, he builds his argument and then concludes it.

The conclusion of Paul's argument, that we are no longer slaves but sons and heirs of God, is truly radical. It deserves some astonishment and emphasis.

A reading that concludes the Nativity story. While the focus is on the infant Jesus lying in the manger, the eyes through which we see him are those of the shepherds. The shepherds modeled Christian devotion from the beginning of our faith.

Amazement is the primary emotion of this story.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Recognize how important your proclamation of the Word of God is. Prepare well and take joy in your ministry.

God's countenance. God's benefits will be given to all who call upon his name.

READING II In the fourth chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul discusses what it means to be an heir of God. He says that until a child matures and comes of age, he or she can be thought of as a slave, but when the proper age is reached, that person is free to inherit all that he or she has been promised. Paul then suggests that those who have been granted God's revelation of his Son through the power of the Spirit are no longer to be

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**.

thought of as slaves, but instead, they are now free to inherit what God has promised them.

This passage from Galatians opens with Paul suggesting that the age of maturity arrived in the incarnation of Jesus, Son of God. This Son performs a twofold mission: first, he is to "ransom," or set free those who subscribe to the Law, and second, he is to provide "adoption" for those set free by his act of liberation. Furthermore, with adoption comes the movement of the Spirit into believers' hearts so that they

might know God and be able to address him as "Father."

Thus, Paul's microscopic portrayal of salvation history suggests a basic change in relationships. Prior to the sending of the Son, people could only relate to God as a slave would to a master. Now, all who have the Spirit in their hearts have a different relationship with God; they are able to see themselves as children in relationship to a father. Because they are now adopted sons and daughters, they are able to inherit all that God promises, namely the fullness of salvation. God's power is ultimately revealed

The shepherds' glorifying and praising are to be our own.

Then the **shepherds** returned,
glorifying and praising God
 for **all** they had **heard** and seen,
just as it had been **told** to them.

When eight days were **completed** for his circumcision,
 he was named **Jesus**, the name **given** him by the **angel**
before he was **conceived** in the **womb**.

in the relationships he forms with those who have been brought near by his Son by the working of the Spirit.

GOSPEL

Today we repeat the proclamation of the Gospel for the Mass of the Nativity at dawn, with the addition of the verse that announces the naming of Jesus at the time of his circumcision. In the context of today's feast, we are meant to focus particular attention on the figure of Mary. Luke reports that "Mary kept all these things" in her heart, as she receives the message of the angels through

the ambassadorship of the shepherds. Thus, we see Mary, in a very real sense, as the first Christian contemplative. God has communicated with her in a special way, beginning with her own immaculate conception and continuing through the birth of Jesus. Certainly, pondering within her heart led her to marvel at what God might have in store for her next.

In addition to her contemplation of divine mystery, we are also meant to see Mary as the model of obedience. Throughout Luke's initial chapters, Mary listens completely to the message of the angel

and gives herself over to God's will. In reporting that Jesus was circumcised and given the name spoken by the angel, we see that Mary is faithful not only to God but to her responsibilities as a Jewish mother. Jesus, like his cousin John before him (Luke 1:59), is to be raised in a thoroughly faithful Jewish household. As the *Theotokos* (an ancient Greek title for Mary, as Mother of God), Mary is the exemplar of contemplative obedience. S.W.