

Mary, the Mother of God January 1, 2012 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

Today is New Year Day, and at mass we celebrate the feast of Mary, the Mother of God. In the past we also celebrated the feast of the Circumcision of our Lord, and on this day we can also celebrate the mass for World Peace. Ordinarily we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, but this year there was no Sunday between them, and so we celebrated the feast of the Holy Family this past Friday.

At this time of year I like to look over the past year, and the media helps us in many ways. Time magazine always has the Person of the Year, this year it was a collective person, the protester from the Arab Spring. Sports Illustrated has the Sportsman or Sportswoman of the year. We read about the ten best movies, the ten best news stories, we see the ten best pictures and ten best political cartoons, etc. We reflect on how this past year has been for us personally.

New Year's Day is also a time to look ahead, to make some resolutions for the coming year. I want to offer some suggestions, and I take these three suggestions from an address given by Pope Paul VI at Nazareth in 1964, on his surprise visit to the Holy Land before the beginning of the final session of the Second Vatican Council. This was one of the readings in the breviary for the feast of the Holy Family.

The pope talked about Nazareth as a model for all of us, and the things we can learn from it. "First," he said, "we learn from its silence. If only we could once again appreciate the great value of silence. We need this wonderful state of mind, for we are beset by the cacophony of noises in our busy and troubled world." I believe our technological advances have made it even noisier. "The silence of Nazareth should teach us how to meditate in peace and quiet, to reflect on the deeply spiritual, and to be open to the voice of God's inner wisdom." In other words, we need to pray, to be quiet before the Lord, as the pope said, "we need a well ordered personal spiritual life, a prayer life." Mary, in the gospel today, gives us a beautiful example of this. I suggest that that be our first resolution.

"Second," he said, "we learn about family life. May Nazareth serve as a model of what the family should be. May it show us the family's holy and enduring character, a community of love and sharing." I just returned from a few days in Chicago with my mother, my brother and his wife, their children and grandchildren. A wonderful time. I hope you all were able to be with family. And this year I hope and pray that we all make family a priority, more important than our jobs or material things or anything else besides God.

"Finally", the pope said, "in Nazareth, the home of a craftsman's son, we learn about work and the discipline it entails. I would especially like to recognize its value and to give it proper respect. I would remind everyone that work has its own dignity, but it is not an end in itself." How grateful we should be for the jobs that we have. We need to pray for those who are unemployed or underemployed, and those finishing school and looking for work. But we should never make work an end in itself, a god.

And so those are the three suggestions, prayer, family, and work, and it is prayer that will help us keep them in their proper order.