

December 30, 2018

This couple was getting ready to go to a New Year's Eve party and the wife had picked out a wonderful dress. She put it on and she was admiring herself in the mirror and she said, "Honey, does this dress make me look fat?" He looked at her and said, "Does this shirt make me look stupid?"

That was a better ending than last week, I told you I was going to give you another one, that's the end of it for the year. That joke anyway.

New Year's is always the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, but in 1968 Pope Paul the 6th implemented the "World Day of Peace." We all want peace, we want peace of mind, peace of heart, peace in our families, and peace in the world. Peace is the tranquility of order and equilibrium and it's the necessary condition for growth and prosperity. A garden cannot grow in a tornado. Nor can human hearts and societies flourish in the midst of violent conflict. New Year's day is a day when even the most pessimistic people have at least a twinge of optimism, a whiff of hope. We hope this coming year will be better than last year, better for ourselves, our families, and the world. It's this natural sense of optimism that we have the World Day of Peace. What was happening in the world in 1968 was war after war after war and Pope Paul the 6th looked around and said, "We need to focus on peace." But, you can have a natural desire for peace but it cannot achieve true and lasting peace in our hearts, our families, and the world, because only Christ, only Jesus Christ can bring about peace. Only Jesus can overcome the deepest divisions, antagonisms, and wounds that feel in conflict from within. Pope Benedict the 16th wrote in his encyclical, *Saved by Hope*, "God is the foundation of hope, not any God but the God who has a human face and has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in it's entirety." This is the central message of Christians; God came to be our savior because we needed a savior. Christ came to bring us the peace which we long for because we cannot achieve that peace on our own.

The blessing that God taught to Moses in today's first reading was also a promise. The promise that God fulfilled by giving us Christ. "May the Lord look upon you kindly, and give you peace." In 218 B.C., the Carthaginian king Hannibal, stood atop the Traversette Pass, high in the Alps and looked down toward the fledgling Roman Empire, the kingdom he had come to destroy. Now, many of us might know Hannibal as the general that took the elephants through the Alps during the war. This time he wanted to free his people from the Roman threat and so he drove his tattered and exhausted army down the mountainside, but one last obstacle blocked his path. It was an enormous boulder wedged in the valley floor, blocking the whole valley. It was impossible to move with chariots and wagons unless the rock was dislodged. Attempts to crack the rock with picks and hammers failed. Sacrifices and incantations to the pagan gods likewise produced no results. Desperate and impatient, Hannibal cried out, "Burn it!" To his half-dead troops, the irrational command seemed insane. Never-the-less, within a few hours' trees were felled and put around the bolder and they set it on fire. They watched as the flames formed an inferno around the rock. Finally, unable to withstand the heat, the rock yielded with a deafening "Crack," that echoed throughout the valley. The rock had split in two. Hannibal and his army were able to drive through and change the course of history. As an aside, Hannibal was considered one of the top five generals in human history.

When we try to bring lasting peace to our hearts, our families, and societies using psychological or diplomatic techniques and tricks, we are like Hannibal's soldiers attacking the giant boulder with hammers and picks. When we put our hopes in science, politics, money and human effort alone to bring peace, we are like the soldiers with their pagan sacrifices. True lasting progress, personally and socially,

can only come with God's grace. Otherwise He wouldn't have had to send us a savior. Christ is the fire that splits spiritual boulders, opening the path to the peace we long for.

On Christmas day, the Prince of Peace was born to the world and for the next thirty years, He grew up under Mary and Joseph's care, until the day He completed His earthly mission and opened the gates of heaven to a fallen race. On that day, when Jesus hung dying on the cross, Mary was still by His side. She was His faithful companion, she was His mother, she is also our mother, given to us from the cross. When we were baptized, we became brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul writes to the Galatians, "Jesus was born of woman, so that through uniting ourselves to Him, we could receive adoption as sons of God. In the Jewish mindset, in God's mindset, there is no difference between biological and adoption, they're both equal. So when we become children, brothers and sisters of Christ, we are on the same level as Jesus. Because we are Christians, we can call God, Father. Not just symbolically but actually and truly. Because we are Christians, we can also call Mary, Mother, just as Christ our brother does. If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, then Mary is the Queen of Peace. If we truly want to experience peace in our hearts, families, and our world, we can do no better than to follow the example of our Prince and our Queen. Jesus entrusted Himself to Mary's care, so should we, everyday simply by giving her some of our time. For her part, Mary never stopped treasuring Jesus. Saint Luke tells us, "Mary kept all these things reflecting on them in her heart." We follow our Mother's example by keeping Christ the spotlight of our hearts, His grace will gradually heal our wounds, strengthen our weaknesses, resolve our conflicts, and bring us more and more of His peace. One of the best prayers for doing that, spending a little time with Mary and Jesus, asking for peace in our lives, of course, is the rosary. There are many types of rosaries with many types of mysteries. None of it is set in stone but it is scripturally based. Every prayer is Mary and Jesus, and you put in God with the Our Father. You , have a big family there. It doesn't have to be the whole rosary every day. One decade, one mystery, but something to remind us that we need to go to the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Peace to be able to have peace. Mary was faithful to her first born Son, she will also be faithful to His brothers and sisters, if we give her the chance.

God bless you.