

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2019

Letting Mary our Mother be our guide

Dear brothers and sisters,

Are you familiar with the story of the journey of the people of God through the desert to the Promised Land? On the night that they celebrated the first Passover, Pharaoh literally commanded them to leave Egypt, because all the first born of man and beast in every family of Egypt had died (Exodus 12: 31-32). This was the tenth plague that the Lord used to compel Pharaoh to let his people go. (You can read about the whole story in Exodus chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14). When the people of God departed Egypt, instead of going through Philistine which was a shorter route, the Lord led them towards the Red Sea. They crossed the Red Sea and made for the wilderness of Shur (Exodus 16:22). Their way led through unmarked, uncharted vast land. Entering into a New Year is like a journey into the vast unknown.

The question is: How did the people of God, who left Egypt, get to their destination? How can we too get to our destination? They got to their destination, because God through Moses was their guide. The priestly blessing that the Lord commanded Aaron and his sons to give them came in the context of their journey through the desert. It was the second year of their forty years journey (Numbers 1:1). It assured them that they were not journeying alone. That the Lord of hosts was with them and that the God of Jacob was their stronghold. That was the original context of the Aaronic blessings in the first reading.

The LORD preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light. Thus, they could travel both day and night (Exodus 14:21). After forty years, they arrived in the land flowing with milk and honey. They did not always listen to Moses whom the Lord gave them to lead them.

On our part as we enter the New Year, God has given us a New Moses. Our new Moses is Jesus, born Mary the Mother of God (*theotokos*). “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 they might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5-6). When the Lord was about to give up his life on the

cross for our salvation, he did not leave us orphans. He gave us his Mother. Speaking to John, the beloved disciple, he said, “Son Behold your mother and to Mary, he said, Mother behold your son (John 19:26). From then onwards, John took you Mary into his reality. Mary in union with her son became our Mother and our guide as well. Thus, the Lord did not leave us without help. Though he is always with us, he gave us Mary as our guiding star. This is why the Church also addressed Mary as the Star of the Sea, *Ave Maris Stella*.

Benedict XVI, Pope emeritus pointed out that human life is a journey and he immediately asked the question,

Towards what destination? How do we find our way. Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus is the true light, that sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need light close by - people who shine with his light and so guide us along the way. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us? With her yes, she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched his tent among us (Benedict XVI, I believe in One God, Location 1055 in the kindle edition).

During the annunciation, the angel did not call Mary by her earthly name. He called her *gratia plena*, full of grace, in the original Greek, *Kekaritomene*. This word, our holy Father emeritus teaches can be translated as “beloved of God” (Luke 1:28). Being the beloved of God, means that Mary is close to each one of us. Would we not let her lead us by hand to our true Promised Land – heaven?