

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Blessed Mother's Birthday! HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MAMA!

Have you ever noticed that we rarely celebrate birthdays in the Church calendar? Most of the saints' feast days are the day they died. Only with the Blessed Mother, St. John the Baptist, and Jesus do we celebrate birthdays. The Church explains that since their holiness, their becoming saints, are not a foregone conclusion at their births, we don't celebrate their first breath, but, rather, after they have lived that life of holiness – after they have made the *choice* to follow Christ, to be embraced by His mercy – do we celebrate their holiness.

With the three birthdays we celebrate, it is different. With Jesus – obviously He is God, and so He is holy of Himself – in fact, one might say that He is *holiness itself*. With St. John the Baptist, the Church says that when Mary greeted Elizabeth, and John leaped in her womb, the Holy Spirit came upon him, and he was made holy in that moment – so from John's birth, he was holy. With Mary, we believe in the Immaculate Conception (December 8th), that from the first moment of Mary's conception in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, Mary was without any stain of sin – Original Sin or actual sin.

Now that we know why we celebrate Mary's birthday and so few of the other saints' birthdays, now we ask how we celebrate it. I invite you today to spend some time with Mary, our Mother. She is truly Queen of the Angels and Saints, Queen of the whole Universe, but she is more *mother* than queen. She longs to be with her children – you and me. The greatest gift Jesus gives her is ... us, as her children.

I encourage you to get to know Mary – the greatest of Saints. As I mentioned on the Assumption (August 15th), everything that is not from my own will, comes to me *through* Mary's loving and merciful hands. In other words, Mary's got your back – she's got my back. We have but to say "yes" to her. As we look at her life, we can learn how we are to follow Christ more closely. Here are a few examples from her life:

- At the Annunciation, when the Angel says, "Rejoice, most exalted one/one who has been and is now filled with divine life" (Luke 1:28), Mary's troubled response is to **ponder** what this might mean. So, too, are we to ponder and look to God when life doesn't make sense.
- When the angel allays her fears, and asks her to be God's mother, her response is, "**Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word**" (Luke 1:38). In humility and obedience, Mary says "Yes" to God, not knowing the future, but trusting His loving Providence. With Mary's help, we can say a trusting "Yes" to God when He calls us beyond ourselves.
- Immediately, Mary "in haste" (Luke 1:39) travels to help her pregnant cousin, Elizabeth. May we, too, reach out in service to others, swiftly!
- At the confirmation of Mary's vocation by Elizabeth, Mary cries out the glory of God in the *Magnificat* (see Luke 1:46-55). We, too are to recognize how God works in our lives, and give Him thanks and praise for all His goodness.
- When the shepherds come with the tale of the Angels' song, and when they find the child Jesus in the Temple (see Luke 2: 15-20, 41-52), she keeps all these in her heart, pondering on what God is doing. So are we to continue to ponder how God works mysteriously and wondrously.
- The one time we see Mary distressed is when she is *not with Jesus* – because she and Joseph had lost Him (Luke 41-52). Mary teaches us to stay close to Jesus, and, if we do, there will never be need to worry or be distressed.
- At the Wedding at Cana, Mary shows us that she is attentive to the needs of those around her, and then gives it all to Jesus ("**They have no wine**" John 2:3). Instructing the servants to "**Do whatever he tells you**" (John 2:5), we see miracles happen. We learn from Mary to be attentive to the needs of others, to entrust (and teach others to entrust) everything to Jesus, and He *will* take care of everything.
- At the foot of the Cross, we find Mary (see John 19). From Mary, we learn that loving others means that we will suffer – suffer as they suffer, suffer with them in a true "compassion" ("to suffer with"). She can strengthen us to undergo any trial, for even in the midst of the most profound suffering in the world, there can be purpose and meaning if there is love.

I encourage you to take some time today to spend time with Mary; it is her birthday, after all! Ponder over how she can lead us closer to Jesus, and ask her to help us be with Jesus as she was.