

Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart...

And not just Mary, but all mothers do this:
they store up memories of their children:
to keep them, hold on to them, to treasure them
lest they ever be lost.

And not just mothers, but all of us.

We all keep memories in our hearts,
continuing to reflect on them as the months and years pass by.

I'm wondering this weekend, this New Year's weekend,
what memories of 2011 are you and I keeping, storing,
holding in our hearts?

Was 2011 a good year or a hard year? a happy year or a sad year?
A healthy year or a year of sickness/
Was it a year of gain or a year of loss? a year of pain or a year of peace?

Did the year just past seem to fly by or did it creep at a snail's pace?

My physical heart has only four chambers
but my soul's heart has many more than four.
With what memories has last year filled the chambers of my heart?

Am I keeping some hurtful memories alongside some happier ones?
Am I holding on to some resentments and grudges
or have I filled some chambers
with forgiveness, with peace-finally-made?

Is there a chamber in my heart now empty
because I've lost someone or a relationship?
Have I locked up that empty place -- or left it open,
waiting for it to be filled with consolation and healing,
with fresh affection?

In the past year did my heart expand to accommodate
everything that came my way? peace and pain alike?
Did my heart enlarge to welcome God's grace in my joys
and his gentle touch upon my grief?

In 2011 did I turn to the Lord living in my heart:
to lean on his strength in my weakness,
to depend on his counsel in my doubt,
to seek his wisdom in my confusion,

to reach for his companionship in my loneliness?

Mary would come, eventually, to keep in her heart
not only joyful recollections of Jesus' birth
but also the painful memories of his suffering and death.

And so it is with us, too.
Our hearts are the storehouses of all that has shaped us
to be the persons we have become
and our hearts are the Lord's dwelling place
where he wants to forgive our sins, heal our wounds,
calm our fears and give us the peace
that comes only from his heart, from his hand.

This New Year's weekend might be a good time for us
to walk through the chambers of our hearts and,
with the Lord's help, empty out
what might be better left behind as a new year begins.

If we've been living in the chambers of sadness
it might be time, again, to enter the chambers of gladness --
and ask the Lord to make his presence known and felt again,
in the good memories we've held and kept in our hearts.

For sure, the year ahead
will find its own share of blessings and sorrows filling our hearts
but with the Lord's help
we can come to accept and even treasure it all
and find peace in good times and hard times alike.

Every week when we come to the Lord's table
we keep the memories of Christ's birth,
and of his suffering, death and resurrection.

And every week the Lord who gave his life for us on the Cross
fills our hearts with his living presence
in the bread and cup of the Eucharist.

Pray that in new year we, like Mary, will keep in our hearts
the memories of our blessing
and treasure them in peace,
in a new year.

-Rev. Austin Fleming