7 Homily for the Solemnity of Mary the Holy Mother of God Year A

1 January 2017

Num 6:22-27; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2:16-21

Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

In first century Israel, the custom was for a young woman to marry as soon as she reached puberty, so we need to remember that Mary would have been around thirteen years old when Jesus was born. Throughout her life Mary, a young woman and mother, must have pondered many things as she learnt what motherhood meant in all its joys and sorrows. We know nothing of the years in Nazareth before Jesus’ baptism by John. But from the glimpses of Jesus’ adult life we know he must have been raised in the religion and traditions of Israel. He would have watched his mother prepare the Sabbath meals and pray her prayer of blessing over the Sabbath lights. He would have learnt from her the stories of his ancestors – Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, Naomi and Esther. The home of Nazareth would have been his first place of schooling. Mary was not only the physical mother of Jesus, she, along with Joseph, was also the nurturer of his personal faith.

During Jesus’ ministry we seldom hear of Mary’s presence, for the Gospel’s focus is on Jesus’ new family of disciples. John’s Gospel names her standing at the cross and Luke presents her in the midst of the disciples at Pentecost. These glimpses assure us that Mary was both mother and faithful disciple. As mother, her role was unique. As disciple she is both mother and sister to all of us. May we all, like Mary, ponder God’s mysterious ways in our hearts and nurture the seeds of faith and life within.

A painting of the Annunciation by an American artist, Henry Tanner, captures for me, something of the mystery and vulnerability of Mary’s life. This painting brings out Mary’s humanity and awe, which I often find missing from other depictions of this young woman.

(The image can be easily found on the internet.)

In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul places the birth of Jesus within a long and evolving history. When he writes, ‘When the appointed time came,’ … the suggestion is there that from the beginning of time Jesus was always part of God’s plan. Paul then moves from the simple statement of Jesus’ birth to what this birth means, that all people now, in and through Jesus, are drawn into his relationship with God, all can now be sons and daughters of God. For Paul, this is the meaning of the Incarnation; that in becoming human, all humanity has been incorporated into the very life of God.