



Archbishop Shelton's Pastoral Reflections

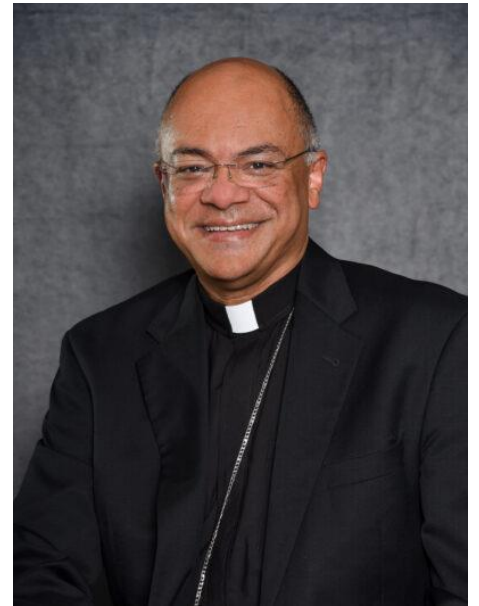
January 2, 2024

Mary Stands at the Beginning of the New Year

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Each New Year, the Church invites us to look to the Blessed Virgin Mary for comfort, inspiration, guidance, and hope in the year ahead. Yesterday, on the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, we asked for our Mother's help in making the New Year a time of peace and prosperity for all nations and peoples.

Mary stands at the beginning of each New Year as a sign of what is possible for us if only we can follow in the footsteps of her Son, Jesus. Mary always points to Jesus. As Pope Francis reminds in the message below, "Our Lady takes nothing for herself, she points to Jesus."



All the problems that have carried over from the old year are opportunities for grace and renewal. As individuals, families, parishes, and as an Archdiocese, we are challenged to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through a profound, personal encounter with Jesus, we can obtain the wisdom, strength, and courage to repent of our sins and renew our lives—and our world—in conformity with the Beatitudes and the spiritual principles of the Gospel. Mary supports us in this renewal, and she inspires us through her example and her intercession.


The Gospel reading for January 1st (Lk 2:16–21), portrays Mary in her most contemplative light: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." But we know that Mary was never passive or indifferent when confronted with difficult situations. "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5) is the direction Mary gives to the servants at the Wedding Feast in Cana, and as Pope Francis reminds us, Mary knows that the Lord speaks to the heart of each person, and she asks that God's wishes be translated into concrete actions and choices.

We have much work to do if we want 2024 to be a qualitatively better year than past years. If we want peace with justice, if we want to end racism in all its forms, if we want to care for the

sick and suffering in our community, if we want to be good stewards of the environment, our common home, and if we want to reverence and respect the sanctity of human life, we must pray and reflect in our hearts, but we must also act decisively with conviction and courage. Of course, we can't do any of this alone. We need the assistance of God's grace and the intercession and prayers of Mary and all the saints. Above all, we need to encounter Jesus in the sacraments (especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist), and with the support and assistance that comes from our communion with Christ, we need to work closely with others to make our world a better place for all.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the year ahead be a graced time for you and your loved ones. Please know that you will be in my prayers throughout 2024, and please pray for me. May you have a blessed New Year!

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Shelton J. Fabre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Archbishop of Louisville

Special Intercessions for the New Year



(Artwork: Public Domain)

Our loving Savior has given us the Blessed Virgin Mary to be our Mother. With confidence in the Father's care, we now pray:

That Mary, Mother of the Church, will guide and protect the Church with her motherly love.

That Mary, Queen of Peace, will intercede to bring lasting peace to the world.

That the intercession of Mary will draw our parish communities closer to Jesus.

For all families: that this New Year will be a time of peace and abiding love.

For the sick, the orphaned, the lonely, and the forgotten: that the Mother of Mercy will be their consolation and their joy.

For all mothers, especially those expecting a newborn child: that they find strength and inspiration from the prayers and example of the Mother of God.

For the grace to deepen our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Loving Father, you bless us with a gift that exceeds all other gifts. You give us a Mother who is the Mother of your Son. Keep us close in your love through Mary's maternal mediation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Used with permission from Magnificat, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, Volume 25, Number 11, January 2024.)

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



(CNS Photo/Paul Haring)

The Virgin Mary is a great teacher of discernment: she speaks little, listens a lot, and cherishes in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19). The three attitudes of Our Lady: she speaks little, listens a lot, and cherishes in her heart. And the few times she speaks, she leaves a mark. For example, in the Gospel of John there is a very short phrase uttered by Mary which is a mandate for Christians of all times: “Do whatever he tells you” (cf. 2:5). It is curious: once I heard a very good, very pious elderly woman, who had not studied theology, she was very simple. And she said to me, “Do you know what Our Lady always does?” I don’t know, she embraces you, she calls you... “No, the gesture Our Lady does is this” [points with his finger]. I didn’t understand, and I asked, “What does it mean?” And the old lady replied, “She always points to Jesus.”

This is beautiful: Our Lady takes nothing for herself, she points to Jesus. Do whatever Jesus tells you: that is what Our Lady is like. Mary knows that the Lord speaks to the heart of each person and asks for these words to be translated into actions and choices. She knew how to do this more than any other person, and indeed she is present in the fundamental moments of Jesus’ life, especially in the supreme moment of death on the Cross.

Dear brothers and sisters, discernment is an art, an art that can be learned and which has its own rules. If learned well, it enables spiritual experience to be lived in an ever more beautiful and orderly manner. Above all, discernment is a gift from God, which must always be asked for, without ever presuming to be expert and self-sufficient.

The voice of the Lord can always be recognized; it has a unique style; it is a voice that pacifies, encourages and reassures in difficulties. The Gospel reminds us of this continually: “Do not be afraid,” (Lk 1:30) how beautiful is the Angel’s word to Mary! “Do not be afraid,” “Do not be afraid,” it is the style of the Lord, “Do not be afraid.” “Do not be afraid!” the Lord repeats to us today too, “Do not be afraid:” if we trust in his word, we will play the game of life well, and we will be able to help others. As the Psalm says, his Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. 119, 105).

(Excerpts from Pope Francis’ weekly Wednesday audience, delivered January 4, 2023.)

My Prayer for You

Please join me in praying this New Year’s Prayer:

*Lord, you make all things new.
You make hope come alive in our hearts,
And you cause our Spirits to be born again.
Thank you for this new year and
For all the potential it holds.*

*Come and kindle in us
A mighty flame.
So that in our time, many will see the wonders of God
And live forever to praise your glorious name.*

+Shelton J. Fabre