

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD – ABC
January 1, 2008

Terrorism; suicide bombers; forest fires in California; natural disasters; man-made disasters; physical, emotional and sexual abuse of others, especially children; the astonishingly cruel things some people do to other human beings. The News fills us with anxiety because we have to admit there is no place on this earth that we are safe.

My biggest fear is that all this anxiety will get out of hand, simply because it fails to realize the single most important thing: that we're not—and never have been—the ones who are in control, no matter how much we want to be, or try be, or scratch and claw for that control. And that's where Mary, the mother of Jesus, comes in.

Today's Gospel tells us, "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart." It's not surprising that Mary would treasure all these things, since Jesus was her son, and mothers have a tendency to treasure things about their children. (Examples)

But even more than this, Mary was also a Christian. True, by culture and religion she actually was a Jew. But in the most spiritual sense of the word, she was a Christian (even though that term didn't exist yet), because a Christian is one who says "yes" to Christ with an open and loving heart.

And that's just what Mary did, in fact she was the first to say it, she said yes to Christ even before he was conceived. The angel Gabriel appeared to her with his strange message, and she said yes immediately. She had no idea what she was getting into or where this would take her or what demands would be made of her or how much pain she would have to suffer.

None of that made any difference to her because she was content to let God take control, no matter what. Could she have known that she would have to give birth to her son in such primitive circumstances? Could she have known she would have to stand helplessly while her son was humiliated, tortured and executed as a criminal?

Let's for a moment put ourselves in Mary's place when the angel Gabriel told her she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. Would we have responded without hesitation like Mary did? I rather doubt it; that's not the way we do things today. First, we would have to think about it for a long time, ask endless questions about all the details, how it would inconvenience us, how it would affect our lives, maybe even try to come up with an excuse of a way out.

Then we'd spend hours on the phone, talking it over with our family and friends to see what they thought of the whole thing. Then we'd probably call our attorney to draw up some kind of agreement to make sure we got something out of it, a bonus or some kind of reward. Then go on Oprah to promote our newfound fame. Then we'd write a book about it and be interviewed by Larry King. Poor Gabriel, standing there all this time waiting for an answer!

The amazing truth is that Mary's life, in spite of its pain, was a life of perfect joy. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Mary was probably the happiest woman who ever lived. This makes sense simply because, since she never committed a sin, her life was perfectly in tune with God's will, and a life in tune with God's will can only be perfectly happy.

How could it possibly be otherwise? Certainly she suffered, but suffering, even deep suffering, is not incompatible with deep happiness. It almost seems like deep suffering somehow *contributes* to happiness.

This beautiful feast we celebrate today—Mary, Mother of God—should be for us a reminder of Mary’s ecstatic joy, not only in being the mother of Jesus, but just in being a Christian, her soul magnifying the Lord. We cannot take away or solve the world’s problems, and God has never promised that if we believe in him and even allow him complete control of our lives, everything will be perfect.

Life surely was not perfect for Mary, nor has it been for anyone else, no matter how good they’ve been. But God *has* promised us that whatever obstacle course we walk through, he walks with us. And *that’s* the difference.

So the world-wide message of anxiety and fear that seems to be creeping up on us from all sides has no place in the life of a true Christian. Like Mary, we too are challenged to live lives of joy and happiness, pleasure and personal fulfillment. And, like Mary, we accomplish this by treasuring all these things—all that Jesus taught us by his words and his actions—and reflecting on them in our heart.