

Homily: Mary Mother of God: 2023: Nm 6:22-27; Ps 67; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2: 16-21

“Mary our Advocate and Guide in the way of Christian discipleship”

1. As we begin the New Year 2023 this weekend, it is a golden opportunity to get **a new spiritual start** as well. I have **12 spiritual recommendations** in my bulletin column this weekend to hopefully help all of us grow in holiness in the coming year – *save that page for the coming year, and read, pray and reflect upon them regularly in 2023*, and ask the Holy Spirit thru the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary to help all of us to put at least one or two into practice immediately, and then hopefully to add more and more as the year goes on. It’s a great weekend and coming week to ask our self: *have I gotten into kind of a rut spiritually, are there certain sins that have become such a part of my life that I don’t really even think about working at changing them instead just rationalize the sins away – if I ever think about them at all? Also are there some big issues in my life that I need to address or change? What are the next steps I need to take to truly grow in holiness - to have God’s will at the center of my life instead of my own? Mary shows us the good way out of these problems with her response of total faith and love and obedience to the Lord’s will for her life, and now she wants to help us make that real in our life.* Taking our Catholic faith from being an abstraction to a more lived daily reality.
2. **God thought the intercession of Mary our advocate before the Throne of God gives us the actual power and strength to change our life and to grow in His likeness on a daily basis.** What beautiful gifts of grace He wants to give us, both in the Sacraments and in our daily life. Let’s ask our Blessed Mother to help us be open to those graces always. This all dawned on me in a special way today (Dec 31st) when I went to Confession as I like to do at the end of each year in anticipation of the New Year. What a gift Confession is and esp. like now to do **a General Confession** of what went on in our life this past year. Remember to get in touch with me if you want to do a General Confession of your whole life up to this point, or just one for the year past. If you don’t have a lot to Confess, you can come at the regularly scheduled times for Confession, but if you have more to talk about an appointment is always helpful. It isn’t just about sin either, but rather our aspirations to grow in holiness, to embrace God’s will for our life more fully – rather than our own which leads us far too often to spiritual mediocrity and an inner

dissatisfaction with the state of our life at present. **God and our Lady want better for us;** and the grace is there for the taking – all we have to do is ask and seek it out in prayer, and in the holy Sacrament of Confession; and after that our Holy Communion will be so much more meaningful and spiritually fruitful.

3. ***I will help you!*** That is what Mary always says to us interiorly when we turn to her as our spiritual Mother esp. in the midst of great trials, sufferings and temptations. So many times in my life: looking back to when I was a confused teenager trying to figure out my life's vocation and why I was on earth now; to when I was in college and then in the seminary, and then in my life as a priest for almost 23 years, I have experienced the real kindness of our Lady. And it almost always was when I was struggling with some sin or difficult discernment decision, or I felt beaten down by life that in prayer I would get a clear sense from an inaudible voice, but heard in the depths of my soul - ***I will help you – don't be afraid and turn over all your worries and concerns to me, so I can turn them over to the Lord.*** Then my soul would be filled with peace and an inner joy and freedom to move ahead spiritually in a good way. Did I always respond with full openness over time? No. Did I always remember those moments of grace fully as I should? No. But it's amazing God's patience with us in our self-willfulness and our Lady's same beautiful patience. **She will gently remind us from time to time if we are getting away from our good spiritual resolutions and from the holy promises we made to God in prayer.** Sometimes Jesus Himself will remind us of that - as I remember one time in recent years: when I was praying the consecration at Mass and while I held up the Host and asked **Jesus** to help me with some great struggle I was having, and He said to me in my soul – ***listen to My Mother and what she asked you to do to help her bring souls to Me.*** Pretty amazing how all this works. So let's ask the Lord to help each of us to be more open to the spiritual help Mary our Mother offers us - by virtue of the Divine commission Jesus gave Mary, while He was dying on the Cross, to spiritually care for us humans, of which the primary goal is to bring all humans to salvation in Jesus thru the gift of His bride the Catholic Church; and to have a special place in our heart for Mary, like St. John the Evangelist who represented all of us at the Cross. God bless you.