

Mary, the Mother of God, year B – January 1, 2012

I learned a new word last week. Yes, it's really important to keep the mind alive. It's up here you really want it, down there for dancing. Anyway, today is the feast of Mary, the Mother of God, the Octave of Christmas. As you know well the octave is the eight day...so we who are trying to follow Christ are celebrating the feast of Christmas for a whole week. Why this octave thing in our church? Well, just think of where we came from...our Jewish ancestors in the faith. Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, the last day of the week and Sunday was the first. So the early Jewish Christians changed their Sabbath to the first day. Why? Two reasons come to mind immediately, Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost both came on Sunday. So from Sunday to the following Sunday...the eight day...the octave.

But there's a little more about the eight day. So important is the resurrection of Jesus that the Church teaches it as a completely new creation. God rested on the seventh day but God in Christ rose on the eight day...a completely new earth shaking event. So that's where we get this octave celebration. One more thing, where does this new creation happen for each one of us? At baptism. So check out our baptismal pool after mass. How many sides does it have? Eight, it's an octagon.

So here we are still celebrating Christ-mas, which you know means the mass of Christ...so why are we making this the eight day a feast of Mary? Are we sort of shoving Jesus aside and concentrating on Mary? Remember I told you a few moments ago that I learned a new word last week. Well the word is 'hodegitria,' a Greek word and I hope that you are suitably impressed. What does it mean? Well it means 'one who points the way.' It's a name given to a very famous icon of Mary that has long ago disappeared but many copies were written of it and paintings were made of it. Most of us are very familiar with some of the copies. One you all know is Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Mary is holding Jesus in her arms, a small but remarkably grown up Jesus and Mary is pointing to him. She is saying with that gesture that he is the way...follow him. And that's what Mary does...she points the way for us to follow him. And like a good mother she tells us in her own words how to follow her Son. "Do whatever he tells you."