

A woman called out to Jesus and said: “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk 11:27-28). Jesus is not trying to be disrespectful to his mother. Being attentive to God’s word is most important and true blessings come from acting on what Jesus has taught us.

Baptism is a common bond by which we can all claim a family relationship with Jesus. We are adopted brothers and sisters through baptism. Saint Paul teaches: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:27-28). We are all equal in the eyes of God. We disrespect our equality when we divide along race, nationality, socio-economic status, or gender. While there is an important blessing that comes from our baptism, that does not negate what Jesus is saying. We still need to hear and respond to the word of God.

The 28th Chapter of the book of Deuteronomy begins by stressing the blessings of obedience. By observing the commandments given by the Lord, “your God, will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you when you obey the voice of the LORD, your God” (1-2).

Despite the blessing of a special relationship between God and the chosen people, obedience was a problem. Whether we are talking about ancient times, or our own culture, there is a part of human nature that turns from God, that listens to the voice of the tempter, and that pushes away the blessings that God offers.

Mary is the exception. She did not turn from God. She did not listen to the voice of the tempter. She did not push away the blessings that God offered to her. And we see time and again how “Blessed” she is:

- The Archangel Gabriel comes to Mary. She hears the word of God spoken through his message and she observes it. She says “Yes” to being the Mother of God. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).
- Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who greets her as follows: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:42). Elizabeth acknowledges that Mary has heard the word of God and observed it by her openness to devoting her life to Jesus. “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (1:45).

Clearly, as the Mother of Jesus a special and blessed relationship exists; however, the obedient response of Mary to observe the word of God demonstrates the response that Jesus wants from each of us.

Returning to our example of the commandments, Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment. In the tradition of the Jewish people, Jesus teaches that the commandments are summed up by love of God and love of neighbor. He illustrates this by telling the story about the Good Samaritan. Both the priest and Levite had heard the word of God but failed to observe it. They offered no help to the man beaten by robbers. However, the Samaritan compassionately reaches out to the man beaten by robbers. The Good Samaritan is blessed for acting with mercy and compassion.

Jesus encourages us to observe his words like the Samaritan did. “Go and do likewise” (Luke 15:37). By hearing the word of God and loving our neighbor, blessings will follow. “The LORD will generously increase the fruit of your womb, the offspring of your livestock, and the produce of your soil” (Dt 28 11).