

**Thursday 1 January, 2009**  
**Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

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*Archbishop of Atlanta*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A few short hours ago, we turned another calendar year. It is now 2009 throughout the entire world. Some of you may have celebrated that event here in Atlanta with family and friends. Some of you, like me, were probably not awake as December became January, as Wednesday became Thursday, and 2008 became 2009. Many people simply do not equate New Year's Day with any special religious feast. Many of you might be here this afternoon simply because going to Mass seems to be the right way to begin a New Year or to bring an old year to completion. Too many Catholics are unaware that January 1<sup>st</sup> is in fact a Holy Day.

The figure of Mary graces the dawn of the New Year. The Mother of Jesus stands silently at the opening of the New Year like every proud mother basking at the image of Her still Newborn Son. She even now ponders the wonder of His birth in Her heart. However, Mary also ponders the events of the past and those of the future in the life of the Church – even the Church in North Georgia. The close of an old year invites many of us to ponder the events of the passing year. Most newspapers and magazines highlight the more noteworthy occurrences of the past year. Some of them try to rank things according to some degree of importance. These invite us to ponder the things of the recent past.

Saint Luke uses the word “ponder” to describe Mary's reflective possession of the events surrounding the birth of Christ. Pondering takes time. Pondering something means looking for its inner meaning. In our fast paced world, most of us don't seem to have a lot of time to ponder. We are so rushed that many events occur and we do not consider their deeper meaning.

Ponder with me, for a few moments some of the things that have happened in our recent past that may have a profound impact on our world, on us personally. Our world economy is deeply troubled. Our economic woes cast a great shadow of doubt and insecurity over the lives of many people. The plight of immigrant people is a serious matter that will demand both justice and mercy. Does the death penalty always ensure justice? Are we becoming a more violent society? Hasn't life itself been disvalued and cheapened by our laws that permit abortion and human bio-genetic activities where the end is said to justify the means? Ponder those events in prayer, in quiet, with Faith. Pondering allows us to find deeper meaning than merely witnessing an event on the evening news or in the morning newspaper.

The Solemn Feast of Mary, Mother of God stands at the head of the New Year as a reminder of Her unique place in the life of the Church. Who would question the importance of a mother in any of our lives? Mothers greet every one of us at the dawn of life. How fitting for the first day of the New Year to be dedicated to the Mother of the Church, the Mother of God. She pondered the strange occurrences that marked the birth of Her Son. Perhaps that is why She was prepared to stand with Him at the foot of the Cross. Pondering helps us all prepare to grasp the really important events in life and to see their deepest meaning. We should all ponder more frequently during the New Year. Peace and good fortune to each of you dear friends. May 2009 be a season of happiness and joy for each one of you and your loved ones from its opening moments to its last.