

Mary, Mother of God, 2008
St. John the Evangelist
Huntsville, Arkansas

I make lots of visits to the hospital, but one visit I will never forget. As I was leaving the hospital, I saw a mechanic working on an elevator. He had dismantled most of the elevator and there were wires going everywhere and he was peering intently at the complex motor. I had never seen the inner workings of an elevator so I stopped to admire his work. When he looked up at me, I remarked with amazement, pointing to the jungle of wires: "Man, I could never do that!" Then he smiled and pointed at my priestly collar and said, "Man, I could never do that!" We both had a good laugh and went away feeling appreciated in our respective occupations.

This year I have been a priest for over 11 years. Here at the end of 2007, I am profoundly grateful to God for the grace to have been a priest this long. I have heard of seminary friends who have left the priesthood, and it saddens me deeply. It is precisely God's grace that makes it possible for me to be a priest. As that sharp elevator mechanic said: not everyone could do that. With God's grace we can do things humanly impossible.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Mary, Mother of God. Of all the people in the world for whom God's grace had accomplished great things, Mary stands head and shoulders above the rest. Mary did what so many of the great saints of the Old Testament failed to do: she was faithful. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David all fell short one way or another

in fidelity to God's grace; but not Mary. Everyone in the Old Testament could point to Mary as the Mother of God and say, "Man, I could never do that!" God's grace can do great things in us, even the humanly impossible.

Folks, as we come to the end of one year and stand on the threshold of another year, take a moment to see what God has done in your life. Look back at 2007. Were there moments of grace in your life: the birth of a child, the healing of a broken relationship, the start of a new friendship, freedom from some addiction, healing from a disease, discovery of a hidden talent? It's important that we take stock of the great things that God does for us. Like Mary in today's gospel, we, too, should "keep all these things, reflecting on them in our hearts."

Now take a moment to look forward to 2008. And as you do, I want to share with you the famous words of Pope John Paul II, "Be not afraid!" Quite frankly, there are a lot of things we could be afraid of in the coming year: global warming, terrorism, the unending war in Iraq, turmoil in Pakistan. But I say to you, "Be not afraid!" Now, I don't say that just because I'm an optimist and always think the "glass is half full," or because I'm a cheerleader like Dc. Chuck and always say "Rah, rah!" I say this because I've seen what God's grace can do – heck, I'm living proof of what God's grace can do! – and God will do great things, even the humanly impossible things, again in 2008. All we have to do is open our hearts and receive His grace.

You know, I don't know what will happen in 2008. We have a God Who loves surprises! But what I do know is that God loves us and He has plans for our wellbeing not our woe, to bless us not to curse us, and to give us His grace if only we'll let Him. As Mary said in her Magnificat: "The Almighty has done great things for me." My friends, the Almighty will do great things for us, too.

Praised be Jesus Christ!