

My favorite grade in school - even as an adult - is Kindergarten.

At five-years-old, everything is exciting and new ... the future always looks bright and inviting.

For a child of this age, nearly everything we as adults take for granted is something new.

I've often as a priest had the opportunity to sit in on Kindergarten classes. The teacher when I was that age seemed terribly old ... and she had one of those clickers to get your attention ... as well as a somewhat harsh German accent.

These days, Kindergarten teachers, at least the ones I've known, have been sweet and cheerful ... and as American as apple pie.

The lesson plans may not be rocket science, but there really is an awful lot of things that we as grown-ups take for granted - Kindergarteners learn the names of the seven days of the week ... as well as the names of the twelve months ... and the names of the four seasons ... the three primary colors ... they learn how to tell time ... how to tie their shoes ... and so many things ...

This time of year, the Church gives us things to learn ... or perhaps remember. We've just a week ago completed the four weeks of Advent; at the end of which we celebrated the Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas.

There are the Twelve Days of Christmas ... maybe you know the words to all twelve verses of the song of the same name - first published in 1780 ... and just for the record, today is the eighth day of Christmas ... where can someone find eight maids a-milking?

On the Church calendar, today, the first day of the New Year, is dedicated to Mary under the title of Holy Mother of God. Our Lady's title of "Mother of God" is one of the four Marian Dogmas - that is, one of four dogmas pertaining to the theology of Mary in relationship to Jesus Christ.

Less than an month ago, we celebrated as a holy day the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception - another one of the Marian Dogmas.

The feast day of our diocese - the Diocese of Saginaw - is the Assumption of Our Lady - another of the four Marian Dogma.

And finally, in the Creed and scattered throughout the prayers of the Mass, we will make reference to the final dogma in our list - the perpetual Virginity of Our Lady.

Mary has been referred to as "ever-virgin" since the earliest centuries of the Church.

In the year 431 AD, the third ecumenical council declared Mary as 'Theotokos' - or "God-bearer," which we most often translate into English as "Mother of God."

The other two dogmas: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption; are more recent declarations dating from the years 1854 and 1950.

Although the dogma of the Immaculate Conception wasn't formally or theologically declared until 1854 - the formal liturgical feast of the Immaculate Conception was first placed on the books in 1476 by Pope Sixtus IV (the fourth).

The dogma of the Assumption of Mary was solemnly defined in 1850 - although narratives of the event date from the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Another perspective of the first day of the year is as the World Day for Peace.

In 1917, one year before the end of World War I (one), Pope Benedict XV (the fifteenth) added the invocation to Our Lady, Queen of Peace, to the Litany of Loreto - which dates from the early 1500s.

And so, on this New Year's Day 2012, let us invoke the Holy Mother of God, and Our Blessed Mother - asking her powerful intercession to give us peace and prosperity - as well as health and happiness

in the new year. May we look forward to a bright and joyful new year filled with many graces and blessings.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.