At the start of the new year, Pope Francis said that **having a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary isn't just something that is nice or good to do, but is an obligation in the life of a Christian.**

"Devotion to Mary is not spiritual etiquette; it is a requirement of the Christian life ," the Pope said Jan. 1. "The gift of the Mother, the gift of every mother and every woman, is most precious for the Church, for she too is mother and woman."

"If our faith is not to be reduced merely to an idea or a doctrine, all of us need a mother's heart, one which knows how to keep the tender love of God and to feel the heartbeat of all around us."

Pope Francis celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica for the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, reflecting on the line in Luke's Gospel that says, "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

He pointed out that in the Gospel account of Christmas, Mary does not speak a single word, simply keeping everything in her heart, pondering it.

What we learn from her silence, he said, is that in quiet is how we "keep" ourselves, how we "keep" our soul free from being corroded by consumerism, "the blare of commercials, the stream of empty words and the overpowering waves of empty chatter and loud shouting."

"We need to remain silent as we gaze upon the crib. Pondering the crib, we discover anew that we are loved; we savor the real meaning of life," he continued.

"As we look on in silence, we let Jesus speak to our heart. His lowliness lays low our pride; his poverty challenges our outward display; his tender love touches our hardened hearts."

This is Mary's "secret," he said, and we should seek to imitate her in this way. Not

closing our hearts out of fear or distress, but handing everything over to God, dwelling on it with Him.

Francis noted that as we start a new year, it is a good time for Christians to also start anew, leaving behind past burdens and baggage and starting over from what really matters. And “today,” the Pope said, “we have before us the point of departure: the Mother of God.”

“**For Mary is exactly what God wants us to be**, what he wants his Church to be: **A Mother who is tender and lowly, poor in material goods and rich in love, free of sin and united to Jesus, keeping God in our hearts and our neighbor in our lives.”**

“Today’s feast tells us that if we want to go forward, we need to turn back: to begin anew from the crib, from the Mother who holds God in her arms,” he stated.

Following the Mass, Pope Francis led the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square. In his message before the prayer, he explained how Mary performs a very special function, as intercessor between her Son Jesus and anyone who is suffering.

“She intercedes, aware that as a mother she can, indeed, must, make present to the Son the needs of men, especially the weakest and most disadvantaged.”

Today we also celebrate the World Day of Peace, the Pope said, explaining that this year’s theme of “Migrants and refugees: Men and women seeking peace,” refers precisely to the weakest and most disadvantaged among us.

“We do not extinguish hope in their hearts; we do not stifle their expectations of peace!” he said, and “may the Lord grant us to work in this new year with generosity to create a more supportive and welcoming world.”