

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

DECEMBER 8, 2014

READINGS: GENESIS 3: 9-15, 20; EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 11-12; LUKE 1:26-38

The singular privilege granted to Mary, whom we honor today traces itself back to the very beginning of her life. Mary was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception through the prevenient grace of God. She did not merit this; nor could she. If you were to think back to when you were a very small child, most people have fond memories of being physically embraced by our parents, of tenderly being held in their arms. This gave to us a sense of safety and an indescribable knowledge that we were unconditionally loved.

Through the singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception, Mary was enveloped from the beginning of her life in the redemptive and saving love of God. As Pope Pius IX wrote in his Apostolic Constitution proclaiming this dogma: “From the very beginning, and before time began, the eternal Father chose and prepared for his only-begotten Son a Mother in whom the Son of God would become incarnate and from whom, in the blessed fullness of time, he would be born into this world.”

What a marvelous thought- that Mary was loved, chosen and enveloped before her own conception to be part of God’s divine plan. Our first reading from Genesis speaks of the enmity placed between the woman and the serpent, between your seed and her seed. God had planned a merciful remedy to this problem of sin, one that would provide for the regeneration of humanity. The Blessed Mother was part of this plan. The very enmity of both Mary and Jesus against the evil one was expressed.

Just as Christ assumed human nature and died on the Cross for our sins, so the most holy Virgin Mary, “united with him by a most

intimate and indissoluble bond was, with him and through him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent and thus crushed his head.”

In our second reading today we are reminded that God desires us to be spotless and without blemish before him. This is not possible due to sin, but we may indeed be made more perfect through grace. If today’s solemnity does not encourage us to pursue holiness of life to a greater degree, its effect in our own lives will be essentially nullified. It would serve only to honor someone else.

The Immaculate Conception signals that God surrounds our life with redemptive love; he envelops us with that love. We have no say in that. Our lives begin in love. They do not gain dignity and meaning depending on how we lead our lives; they have it from the beginning, even despite our own original sin.

We must give our “Yes” unequivocally. We all know the word that sometimes follows our “Yes,” namely, ...but..” This is a word that if not negating the “Yes,” certainly qualifies it. “I thought I told you to take out the trash.” “Yes, you did, **but** you see that was right when the phone rang and then I had to speak to Jimmy and...” All your mother ever heard was the “but...” Everything else was lost.

The first part of Mary’s “Yes” happens even **before** she was born. By the power of heaven, the earth must accept the arrival of grace so that it can really come to earth and carry out its work of liberation. Today we celebrate the arrival of God’s grace in the person of the mother of our Savior. In so doing, God has surrounded all of humanity with loving fidelity. The gift given to Mary is a gift whose effects are of benefit to all of us. God is faithful. Having given us the beginning; he will bring it to its end. We cannot escape from His fidelity; it has enveloped us. Indeed, our souls proclaim the greatness of God.