

Imagine a huge flood, like in the days of Noah, and a dove sent to find dry land, but cannot find one. Imagine a camel train lost in a desert in the midst of summer, suddenly seeing a spring water after days of walking. Imagine a small flower growing up among thorns. This is what the Virgin Mary is: a peaceful dove ([Hail Mary: gentle woman](#)), an oasis of pure water, the infinitely beautiful woman – blessed among women - above the mud of a world stained by sin, “a rose among thorns” ([Song 4:7](#)). She is the woman in the Book of Revelation that the water spewed by the dragon could not sweep away([1:15](#)).

By a prevenient grace, the Most High made Mary a pure container, a precious vessel, the first Tabernacle who carried His Son, Fount of all holiness, in her flesh. Yes, Mary is the anticipated and the most beautiful fruit of God’s Salvation accomplished in the Paschal Mystery of her Son (prevenient grace). She is the receptacle of the fullness of God’s grace. Exempt since her very conception, from the original sin, Mary has attested to the primacy and freshness of divine Grace.

Fr René Laurentin, a French Priest, summed up this mystery in one sentence. He wrote, “Mary is the first of the redeemed ones; by looking at her, we already have an idea of God’s plan for us.” Indeed, when we look at her, we immediately are aware of what we were created to be – sharers in divine Beauty.

This is what the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is reminding us: we were created to share the Lord’s Beauty, which is of the order of grace, and not of the order of the flesh. That is, the beauty of the soul. This is why when Archangel Gabriel came to Mary, he did not greet her by her name of flesh, but by her name of eternity, not “Hail Mary!” but “Hail, full of grace!”

In 1858, Mary appeared to a fourteen-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in Lourdes, France, 18 times. In the beginning, no one wanted to believe her, even the Nuncio Apostolic of the time. He questioned her, asking,

“Didn’t the woman scare you?” Bernadette replied, “Yes, I was very afraid, especially the first time, but then she was so beautiful!”

And at the grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes, it was the Virgin Mary herself who revealed to Bernadette the secret of this beauty, saying to her, “I am the Immaculate Conception!”

Brothers & and sisters, “The world needs beauty so as not to sink into despair” (Dostoyevsky); most importantly, beauty of the soul. Today’s celebration of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception invites us to embrace our own beauty; that is to avoid sin, to let God’s holiness be resplendent in us.

In today’s Gospel, we heard Mary’s response to the Archangel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord!” The service that Mary performs for each one of us, in the Church, helps to remind us, through her virginal purity, of our original vocation; a purity that “the birth of her Son didn’t diminish, but consecrated” ([Prayer over the offerings / Nativity of Mary](#)). Likewise, it is to invite us to beautify our life by making it, like her, transparent to the divine Light.

“To be or not to be.” You know this saying; don’t you? Applied spiritually, we know that since the fall of our first parents, no one can be both flesh and pure. But Our Lady is the exception to the rule. A Christian poet, Charles Péguy, said, “No one can be both fleshly and pure but the Virgin Mary... Being flesh, she is pure; but being pure, she is also flesh!” In her, spirit, body, and soul are fully aligned with each other and with God’s will. Therefore, Mary Immaculate helps us by what she is and by what she does; to rediscover the depth and dignity of our persons: spirit, body, and soul, in the image and likeness of God, Fount of all beauty.

May the grace of this solemnity make us grow in our original vocation as children of God who “chose us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we might be holy, immaculate before Him”, in beauty and love ([Eph 1:4](#)). Amen!