

Homily
Immaculate Conception
Dec. 8, 2022

The angel Gabriel called her “full of grace.” The poet Wordsworth called her “our tainted nature’s solitary boast.” She is like the dawn before the sunrise. She is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who from the moment of her conception was preserved immaculate, free from original sin and free from any other sin.

This Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception always falls in the season of Advent because it is part of the great story of the coming of God into the world. From all eternity he had planned to send his only Son as our Savior, because he knew that humanity would fall into sin, even from the very beginning, as we heard moments ago in the Book of Genesis. And when the time came for his coming, there was one final touch that God accomplished for the fulfillment of his plan. He preserved Mary from sin so she could be a worthy source of humanity for the Son. She was conceived immaculate in her mother’s womb precisely for the moment described in today’s gospel when Jesus was conceived in her womb.

In Genesis, we hear that Eve, despite her sin, became the mother of all the living. But how much more so can Mary be called the New Eve, the source of life for all the living? She brought Christ our Savior, the author of eternal life into this world. But because of that holy mission entrusted to her, God made her holy and immaculate, untainted by sin, and she in turn spoke her yes to the Son of God, and gave him his human nature.

As the poet said, Mary is indeed our tainted nature’s solitary boast. And we should boast about Mary. We should tell the whole world about this miracle of grace. “See what the power of Christ has done for a member of our human family.” And that’s what gives us hope. If the grace of our Savior is great enough to preserve Mary, who is a human person just like us, from the stain of sin, then his grace is great enough to heal us from our sins as well.

As we make our Advent preparations, we realize in all honesty that we are not worthy of God. We aren’t worthy that the Lord should come to us. And yet he comes. He comes to make us holy, just as he came in grace to Mary to make her holy. St. Paul reminds us of our calling in the words of our second reading: God chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him.” He desires to dwell within us just as surely as he desired to dwell in the soul and in the womb of Mary.

But as we examine our lives, we realize that we are still far from living up to this calling. We still fall into sin. But that’s no reason to give up, or even to be discouraged. Always remember that the same Savior who preserved Mary free from sin wishes to cleanse us from our sin. He wishes us to be full of grace just as she was. And Paul reminds us again, God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens... to be holy and without blemish before him.” So even in our human frailty, God blesses us with every spiritual blessing and calls us to holiness, just as he called Mary, his own mother.

Mary is especially close to us this evening, because under the title of the Immaculate Conception, she is the patroness of this cathedral church and of our entire diocese. She is also the patroness of our nation. In her unique holiness, she holds us under the mantle of her love and leads us always to Jesus, her Son. Just as she held Jesus in her arms, both at his birth and after his death, so now she holds us close to her immaculate heart. She teaches us by example to say always “yes” to the will of God: “Let it be done to me according to your word.” And she urges us to open our hearts for the coming of her Son, who brings salvation to all who put their trust in him. Dear friends, as we celebrate Mary’s Immaculate Conception, let us pray this night that Jesus will come to us with his grace, and make us holy, free from sin. And let us

ask Mary to support us with her prayers: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”