

Solemnity of The Immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin 8 December 2023

Today the church universal celebrates the solemnity of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast has been in existence for long time but was declare, pronounce, and define firmly as Dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX. We must all know that it was not Mary who seek to be called immaculate, she refers to herself as **“The handmaid of God”** handmaids in those days were the lowest servants in household of God. This suggest that Mary has been serving in the house of God since her parents Joachim and Ann presented her to the priest in the Temple. The immaculate conception of Mary should not be seen as contradiction. God created Adam and Eve purely without sin, until they had eaten of the tree forbade by the Lord as we heard in our first reading:

God was not happy with them because they have disobeyed His precept. It is the plan of God that we all serve Him and have an everlasting loving relationship with him, since this plan has been distorted by sin of disobedience, God finds a means of reconciling us with Himself, through Christ Jesus. This Jesus will come in a Human form to identify with us, God chose that he should come through another human. The one who is coming will be Holy, and there is not how a holy one should come from an unholy womb, it may contaminate the child. Since the fall of man was caused through first woman, God decided to bring salvation through second woman; that is why He prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary from her mother’s womb without any sin to carry one who is without sin in her womb.

In the gospel, Angel Gabriel venerated her and told her what she never knew about herself, when he said, ‘Hail Mary.’ Hail was used in Latin (*Ave*) as a greeting to Caesar, Kings, or Emperor or in Greek (*Chairo*) salute, and in Hebrew it is called (*Shachah*) it was used to describe both worship of God and veneration or honor of the kings. So, Mary was seen as a queen even at that stage: Angel Gabriel did not stop at that but went further to say, “Full of Grace” Four years ago Pope Francis explained that in calling Mary “full of grace,” the angel was acknowledging that the Blessed Mother was filled with the presence of God. If Mary was occupied by God, there is no room within her for sin. Therefore, it is no contradiction that the church defined immaculate conception as Dogma. Dogma is a revealed truth by God to his Church. When she received the message from the angel, the bible tells us she was troubled but she was positive, that is why she said “Behold I am the Handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” she accepted willingly to cooperate with the will of God as against the response of the First woman in our first reading, when God asked her, “ what is this that you have done? She was not straight forward and was not ready to accept her fall rather blaming the serpent. Just as sin came through one woman, so the salvation of the world came through a woman called The Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary used her free will to choose what is good, we too can choose either to cooperate with God and strive after holiness in life or remain with the world and perish in sin. This is a decision for everyone to make individually.

May the spirit of God inspire and sustain in us, the decision to follow him faithfully in holiness of life. Amen

Peace,

Fr. JINGBE Simon