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# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF OUR LADY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

*Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam.*  
He that shall find me, shall find life.  
(*Prov* 8:35)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**H**AVE YOU PERHAPS already asked yourself, one day or another: Who in the creation has been, and that from the very beginning of mankind, the person who has most benefited from the fruits of redemption, namely, the fact that Christ has set free at the price of His Paschal mystery, His death and resurrection, a mankind revolted against God? The mind, the historian, might wear themselves out as they search their remembrances or libraries. The answer is simple, and might seem provocative: it is Mary.

It is worth quoting the lines the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* devotes to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception:

To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.”\* The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace”. †  
In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her

\* *LG*, n. 56.

† *Lk* 1:28.

faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

† *Lk* 1:28.

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace”<sup>†</sup> through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.<sup>‡</sup>

‡ Pius IX,  
*Ineffabilis Deus* (1854),  
DS 2803.

The “splendour of an entirely unique holiness” by which Mary is “enriched from the first instant of her conception” comes wholly from Christ: she is “redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son”.<sup>\*</sup> The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” and chose her “in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love.”<sup>†</sup>

\* *LG*, nn. 53, 56.

† Cf. *Eph* 1:4.

The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God “the All-Holy” (*Panagia*), and celebrate her as “free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature”.<sup>‡</sup> By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.<sup>a</sup>

‡ *LG*, n. 56.

a. *CCC*,  
nn. 490-493.

These lines bear witness to God's special and prevenient goodness towards Mary. The passage taken from the Book of Proverbs we have just heard applies first to the Word, the Father's eternal Son and Wisdom. It is allegorically applied to Mary, who was also present from the very beginning in God's mind.

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made any thing from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made.<sup>b</sup>

b. *Prov* 8:22-23.

But God's plan must be carried out, and the place for this unique conception is Anne's womb. Anne and Joachim, as all parents, are entrusted by God with the precious deposit of a new life. Both of them are called to become the servants of life, as Vatican II pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* recalls:

For God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.<sup>a</sup>

a. GS, n. 51.

Whereas each child is conceived with the mark of original sin, Mary by a unique privilege is preserved from this stain. As she states in the *Magnificat*, God “hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”<sup>b</sup>

b. Lk 1:48.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts:

The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the “reverse side” of the Good News that Jesus is the Saviour of all men, that all need salvation and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. The Church, which has the mind of Christ,<sup>‡</sup> knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.<sup>c</sup>

‡ 1 Co 2:16.

c. CCC, n. 389.

After the good news of creation, after the bad news of man’s first sin and rebellion against God, comes the good news that the time of reconciliation has opened. The mystery of Mary’s immaculate conception draws in advance from this source.

The teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we quoted at the beginning of this homily also evokes how the Church’s understanding and clarification of the angel Gabriel’s salutation to Mary, “Full of grace,” has unfolded throughout the centuries. The dogma is the final outcome of this process.

Every evening at Vespers, the Church makes us intone the *Magnificat*. “He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His name.”<sup>d</sup>

d. Lk 1:49.

Indeed, He that is mighty has done great things for Mary, but Mary also has done great things for God, and for us, too, as she allowed the gifts of God to bear fruit. Her work is not yet finished. After the end of her life on earth, having been borne in her body and soul into Heaven, she now intercedes for us to be delivered from all our sins, as the secret of the Mass makes us ask.

A few weeks before Christmas, the feast of the Immaculate

Conception is, as it were, a prelude to the wonderful things God is going to carry out through His incarnation.

These good news are for us, and for all the men of our time. Let us announce to these men that God looks with favour on each human life from its very beginning. “His mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him.”<sup>a</sup> Let us ceaselessly invite them to bless Him and proclaim the holiness of His name. From Him, each man receives life and movement and being.<sup>b</sup>

a. *Lk* 1:50.

b. Cf. *Acts* 17:28.

May Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, the “Full of grace,” lead us on a safe path towards the heavenly city, so that, seeing Jesus, we may taste the joys of eternity.

Amen.

