

Sollemnitas In Conceptione Immaculata B.V.M.

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. In the First Reading from Genesis we read the passage traditionally called the *Proto Evangelium*. After the fall, God calls Adam and Eve to judgment for having disobeyed his command. Notice that neither He nor she are cursed, the only one cursed is the serpent. This does not mean that God tolerates sin, but on the contrary that his justice is merciful. In fact our reading tells us that God chastised them both for their disobedience: Adam was chastised with having to sweat to yield the bread from the earth and Eve with bearing children in pain. God's full strike is reserved only to curse the serpent: from day one the serpent had her days counted, for God announces that an offspring from Eve will strike the serpent's head.

B. Ps 98 invites us to sing a new song for the event of our salvation is approaching. The Lord is coming and he shall deliver us all from bondage, sin and death itself.

C. Mary stands in history as the only human being without sin in the likeness of Jesus who alone is blameless, shameless, and holy (Heb 7:26). Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians that we are all called to live a life of purity. Mary is the model for any Christian who wishes to enjoy the benefits of God's choicest blessings manifested in Christ Jesus.

D. In the Annunciation account, Luke gives us pretty details about Mary's life and the Mystery of the Incarnation. From the usage of the perfect participle passive of the Angelic Salutation to Mary we can infer that when the Angel encounter Mary to greet her and to announce her the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Mary has already been transformed by the grace of God. "Full of grace" or *Kecharitomene*, means that Mary had been transformed by the Lord prior to the Annunciation. Our inquisitive minds would love to know exactly when this event took place. The Church responds to that question with a Solemn Dogmatic Declaration (1854), in which Mary is declared as conceived without sin in order to be the Mother of God.

III. Meditatio

John Paul II on the Immaculate Conception

"Down the centuries, the conviction that Mary was preserved from every stain of sin from her conception, so that she is to be called all holy, gradually gained ground in the liturgy and theology. At the start of the 19th century, this development led to a petition drive for a dogmatic definition of the privilege of the Immaculate Conception.

Around the middle of the century, with the intention of accepting this request, Pope Pius IX, after consulting the theologians, questioned the Bishops about the opportuneness and the possibility of such a definition, convoking as it were a "council in writing". The result was significant: the vast majority of the 604 Bishops gave a

positive response to the question. After such an extensive consultation, which emphasized my venerable Predecessor's concern to express the Church's faith in the definition of the dogma, he set about preparing the document with equal care.

Finally in 1854, with the Bull *Ineffabilis*, Pius IX solemnly proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception: "... We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful" (DS 2803).

The freedom "from every stain of original sin" entails as a positive consequence the total freedom from all sin as well as the proclamation of Mary's perfect holiness, a doctrine to which the dogmatic definition makes a fundamental contribution. In fact, the negative formulation of the Marian privilege, which resulted from the earlier controversies about original sin that arose in the West, must always be complemented by the positive expression of Mary's holiness more explicitly stressed in the Eastern tradition.

Pius IX's definition refers only to the freedom from original sin and does not explicitly include the freedom from concupiscence. Nevertheless, Mary's complete preservation from every stain of sin also has as a consequence her freedom from concupiscence, a disordered tendency which, according to the Council of Trent, comes from sin and inclines to sin (DS 1515). Granted "by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God", this preservation from original sin is an absolutely gratuitous divine favour, which Mary received at the first moment of her existence. The dogmatic definition does not say that this singular privilege is unique, but let's that be intuited. The affirmation of this uniqueness, however, is explicitly stated in the Encyclical *Fulgens corona* of 1953, where Pope Pius XII speaks of "the very singular privilege which was never granted to another person" (AAS 45 [1953], 580), thus excluding the possibility, maintained by some but without foundation, of attributing this privilege also to St Joseph. The Virgin Mother received the singular grace of being immaculately conceived "in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race", that is, of his universal redeeming action. The text of the dogmatic definition does not expressly declare that Mary was redeemed, but the same Bull *Ineffabilis* states elsewhere that "she was redeemed in the most sublime way". This is the extraordinary truth: Christ was the redeemer of his Mother and carried out his redemptive action in her "in the most perfect way" (*Fulgens corona*, AAS 45 [1953], 581), from the first moment of her existence. The Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the Church "admires and exalts in Mary the most excellent fruit of the Redemption" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 103). This solemnly proclaimed doctrine is expressly termed a "doctrine revealed by God". Pope Pius IX adds that it must be "firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful". Consequently, whoever does not make this doctrine his own, or maintains an opinion contrary to it, "is shipwrecked in faith" and "separates himself from Catholic unity". In proclaiming the truth of this dogma of the Immaculate Conception, my venerable Predecessor was conscious of exercising his power of infallible teaching as the universal Pastor of the Church, which several years later would be solemnly defined at the First Vatican Council. Thus he put his infallible Magisterium into action as a service to the faith of God's People; and it is significant that he did so by defining Mary's privilege.

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III. Oratio

We begin our celebration by quoting Is 61 which reads: *“I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God; for he has clothed me in the garment of salvation and robed me in the cloak of justice, like a bride adorned with her jewels (Introit); Saint Luke sees in this quote the type of Mary, who is “sinless from the first moment of her conception” (OP, PG, PC). Saint Luke is also responsible for the most ancient Marian invocation, the Hail Mary: “Hail Mary, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women” (OA). Under the principle of Lex Orandi, lex credendi, today’s Preface is very important to focus on the Catholic Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: “You allowed no stain of Adam’s sin to touch the Virgin Mary. Full of grace, she was to be a worthy mother of your Son, your sign of favor to the Church at its beginning, and the promise of its perfection as the bride of Christ, radiant in beauty. Purest of virgins, she was to bring forth your Son, the innocent lamb who takes away our sins. You chose her from all women to be our advocate with you and our pattern of holiness;” For the Church confesses that Mary is the instrument from which came forth Christ our God, the sun of justice (CA).*

III. Contemplatio

Prayer of Total Consecration to the Immaculate Virgin Mary (Composed by St. Maximilian Kolbe)

Oh Immaculate, Queen of Heaven and Earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother, God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to thee. I (name), a repentant sinner, cast myself at thy feet, humbly imploring thou to take me with all that I am and have, wholly to thyself as thy possession and property. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity, whatever most pleases thou. If it pleases thou, use all that I am and have without reserve, wholly to accomplish what was said of thee: “She will crush thy head,” and “Thou alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world.” Let me be a fit instrument in thy immaculate and merciful hands for introducing and increasing thy glory to the maximum in all the many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus help extend as far as possible the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For wherever thou enter thou obtain the grace of conversion and growth in holiness, since, it is through thy hands that all graces come to us from the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

V. Allow me to praise thee, o Sacred Virgin

R. Give me strength against thy enemies.