

HOM Immaculate Conception 2022 A

We all came into this world with a spiritual defect – lacking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit from the first instant of our lives – from the moment of our conceptions. This is the result of Adam and Eve’s original sin. Their original sin of disobedience to God’s command caused them to lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and they were thus separated from God. As their descendants, we are conceived and brought into being without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and so, are also separated from God from the first instant of our lives. We suffer the effects of Adam and Eve’s original sin, or for shorthand, we say we are born with original sin.

And because of original sin we were left spiritually weak. Theologians say we lost moral integrity. As St. Paul puts it in his Letter to the Romans: *“I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want.”* (7: 19) Wounded by original sin, we do not readily know what is good, and the inclination to choose what is good and the power to do it have been diminished in us.

We also suffer from concupiscence which means that we have desires that are dis-ordered or excessive. Dis-ordered desires are not directed or inclined to what is good, but to what is unreasonable and not good, like same sex attraction. Inordinate or excessive desires can include everything from gluttony to lust.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the only human being since Adam and Eve to come into existence without the affliction of original sin and its wounds. From the first instant of her life – i.e., from her conception, Mary was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is what we celebrate today – Mary’s Immaculate Conception (nine months before we celebrate her birthday on September 8th). Mary’s conception without original sin – her Immaculate Conception -- was a singular privilege given to her by God the Father in anticipation of His Son’s saving Death and Resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to and through His Church, beginning with Mary. It was given to her because she was chosen by God even before she was brought into being to be the mother of His Son in the Flesh, and to help her consent to this.

Yes, Mary enjoyed full spiritual health so that she could give an affirmative answer to God’s proposal that she bear God’s Son who was to restore full spiritual health and more to humanity. That proposal was communicated to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel – an event referred to as the Annunciation – recounted in today’s Gospel reading.

You know, people sweat out many things – the Cuban missile crisis was a big one for the people of that day (as I recall it), but there are more common things like the results of a test, the outcome of an operation, the birth of a child, election results, and so on. Still, there is nothing bigger – nothing more important -- in all of human history than Mary’s response to the words of Gabriel. On her answer rested the fate of all humanity.

And even though she was given every spiritual blessing to help her say YES to God’s love and His will, she was still free to say NO. After all, Adam and Eve were endowed with the grace of Holy Spirit from the first moment of their lives, and they said NO to God’s love and His will by their disobedience to His command. They were, however, tempted to do so by the serpent – the Devil. God allowed this temptation from without because man was to be given a place even above the angels, some of whom, refused to do God’s will as a result, tradition says, and became the enemies of Man in their rebellion toward God.

It appears that Mary was mercifully shielded from the Evil One at that decisive moment of the Annunciation so that her response to God’s love and His will would come solely from her Immaculate Heart – not wounded by sin, untainted by concupiscence – totally given to the Father’s love and His will like the Heart of God’s Son when He consented from all eternity to the Father’s will to become Man.

Humanity would thus be given a second and final chance to share in God's blessedness – person by person. And their YES to God's love and his will would unite them to Him and with one another in Him.

However, just like Jesus who, as He carried out His Father's will on earth, was tempted by the Devil to turn away from the Father's will, we can suppose that, between the time of the Annunciation and Mary's Assumption into Heaven, the Mother of Jesus was likewise tempted by the Devil to turn away from God's will. But like, Jesus, she did not, not even in the least.

I like to say that the Immaculate Conception was God's gift to Mary (and to humanity because it helped her to consent to the Incarnation of God's Son), and that Mary's gift to God (and to humanity) was not only her YES to God's proposal that she give Flesh to God's Son, our Savior) but also her sinless life on earth even in the face of temptations by the Devil, culminating in her Assumption into Heaven that affirmed her sinlessness. Thus, she was consummately one with her Son -- Who shared in our humanity in every way but sin -- from her Immaculate Conception to her Assumption into eternal glory with Him.

But what about us – you and me? Well, the privileges given to Mary have also been extended to us also in various ways in some measure. For example, Mary was conceived without original sin, and for us, original sin is taken away when we are baptized and receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the grace to know and do God's will. Mary remained sinless her whole life unto Heaven, and our personal sins can be absolved in confession or even with the Anointing of the Sick, as needed, if we repent of them, so we can overcome our sins and even atone for them here on earth, and so, be perfected – become *holy and without blemish before God* as St. Paul says in our second reading – like Mary -- ready to go straight to Heaven when we die.

Even what took place between Mary and God at the Annunciation and was lived out unto Calvary and her Assumption into eternal life can take place between us and God at Holy Communion and be lived out unto the Cross and Resurrection. At the Annunciation, at her consent, Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God took Flesh in her. Jesus was conceived in her. She and Jesus were then one, yet distinct. And she lived out that consummate oneness with Jesus unto the Cross with Him, where she offered Him to the Father for the life of the world and offered herself with Him in her heart to the Father for the salvation of all. The grace of the Holy Spirit that Jesus poured out from His pierced Heart on the Cross, would thus go first to Mary, overshadowing her earlier at the Annunciation, and then through her heart at the foot of the Cross to be communicated to all the willing.

Brothers and sisters, we can and must participate in this, for our own good and the good of others and to bring Christ's saving work to completion. At Mass, right after the elevations, with the priest, but silently, we are to offer Jesus to the Father as Mary did on Calvary. Then at Holy Communion, receiving Jesus into our bodies and hearts, and being one with Him yet distinct, like it was with Mary and Jesus, we can offer ourselves to Him and with Him to the Father unto the Cross for the sanctification and salvation of all those we hold dear and all whom the Father loves. By this we communicate to them that superabundant, overflowing grace of the Holy Spirit that Jesus pours out to us from the Cross through the heart of Mary.

Make no mistake about it, this life is truly a challenge – a spiritual battle! The angels who rebelled against God did so with a fully informed, instantaneous and eternal act of the their wills, without any spiritual weakness or outside temptations – seeking to become gods apart from the one true God. Adam and Eve, also without any spiritual weakness, but tempted by the diabolical enticements and threats of the serpent-dragon, fell from God's grace with an act of disobedience. Only the Blessed Mother, without any spiritual weakness and in oneness with her sinless Son, confronted by the Evil One and crushing his head, lived a perfectly sinless life unto the Cross of obedience and love.

You and I, on the other hand, came into this world wounded by original sin, spiritually weak, interiorly inclined by concupiscence to choose what is not good for us, and surrounded and beset by temptations that lead us away from the Lord. If we are going to make it to Heaven, and help others to do so, we have to go all out by going all in with Jesus, like Mary did. We can do that in the way the Church urges us to, by Eucharistic Self-Offering at every Mass, lived out in between, assisted by Mary our immaculate Mother who perfects our self-offering to be like hers, and does so with the help of St. Joseph.

If we do this, not only will Mary see to it that we make it to Heaven, along with those for whom we offered ourselves, but we will also become there God in nuptial oneness with the Son of God. Here are the words to pray silently and sincerely for this at Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER.