

Homily: Immaculate Conception: December 8, 2016: Gen 3: 9-15, 20; Ps. 98; Eph 1: 3-6, 11-12; Lk 1: 26-38

“Mary as our Spiritual Mother and Model in Holiness”

What a beautiful feast this is! We as a Church are celebrating the fact that by a singular grace of God, the Virgin Mary, in light of her future role as the mother of the Redeemer, was preserved from the stain of **original sin**, in order to be a worthy vessel to bring the eternal Son of God into the world. Blessed Pope Pius IX declared this dogma infallibly in 1854, formally affirming the traditional belief of the Church. At the approved apparitions of Our Lady to St. Bernadette at Lourdes, France in 1858, our Lady said, “I am the Immaculate Conception,” which was a confirmation of the dogma declared 4 years earlier by Pius IX.

1. **Mary is our model in striving for purity of heart**, to try to avoid all sin, big and small, so as to have a singular focus of loving God and our neighbor in Him. It is very mysterious but beautiful for those of us who have sinned to ponder someone who never did sin in her life. Yes she was given a special grace by God to be preserved from original sin and so didn't have the same disordered passions and tendency toward sin (concupiscence) that we have, but remember we now live in the “era of grace” because of Christ's redemption of the human race, and so have the opportunity to avoid all sin, as well. Also remember that the first human beings, whom we call **Adam** and **Eve**, were also created without original sin on their souls, and yet they CHOOSE to sin, despite that. Mary could have done the same, but chose not to!! Adam and Eve said NO to God; Mary undid that no with her unconditional YES, “*Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*” Even through she didn't understand fully what God was asking of her, she trusted and said, YES! What a model for us in the ups and downs of earthly life! We must do the same: giving our total TRUST to God alone!
2. To help us in this process of growing in trust and goodness, in purity of heart, Jesus gave us His mother Mary from the Cross to be our spiritual Mother. **She is truly the Mother of our spiritual life.** She protects us from sin and the evil one

and hides us under the mantle of her motherly protection, if we turn to her in filial love on a daily basis. This is why praying a set of **the mysteries of the Rosary** daily and being enrolled in and wearing her **Brown Scapular** is so important. What tremendous spiritual aids to growing in holiness, big gifts from our Blessed Mother to keep us on the narrow but beautiful path that leads to her Son and eternal life with the Blessed Trinity. We are also called to imitate her virtues, especially her example of humility, obedience, and love of God and neighbor in all circumstances, especially the difficult ones. This feast should remind us of her holiness and that in her motherly kindness she wants to share holiness with us by showing us the way to union with the Blessed Trinity. Devotion to her is a shortcut to union with God, as the great Marian saint St. Louis de Montefort put it so well in his classic work: ***True Devotion to Mary.***

3. Finally this feast is a reminder to us of the fact that Mary can help us **prepare spiritually for Christmas** if we turn to her in love. **We can never look at the Mother without thinking of the Son.** Let us ask her to help us prepare our minds and hearts to focus on Jesus, who is *“the reason for the season.”* As I’ve said, the **best gift** we can give to Jesus on Christmas is a heart renewed in Him and committed to pursuing God’s will in all the circumstances of life, i.e., in trust and holiness. Mary is the model of this very reality, so we can ask her to assist us to arrive at the same place of goodness. **This is what authentic devotion to our Lady leads to: a life more committed to God’s will.** The foundation for this is to admit we need God’s help, as many of us did the other day at our Advent Penance service. Let us all say with Mary on a daily basis, *“May it be done to me according to Your word,”* and **mean it** for it is the narrow path that leads to Heaven: doing God’s will. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.* AMEN. God bless you.