

Immaculate Conception of Mary

Luke 1:26-38

Today's feast is the celebration of

- Mary
- something very mysterious about Mary that it took the Church time to grasp
- the wondrous work of the *Trinity* in Mary

The Immaculate Conception is not very explicit in the Bible,
such that it makes some Christians crazy!

The Immaculate Conception is very *implicit* in the Bible.

And it *should* make us crazy, *crazy in love*.

The primary passage that serves as a passageway
into the Immaculate Conception is Luke 1:28: "Hail, full of grace",
the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary, during their first encounter.

It may seem like slim pickings, but it is in fact, not a problem.

On the surface it *is* slim pickings,

- but read deeply in faith, with hope and love,
- we discover more
- it becomes a passageway

"Hail, full of grace" is a declaration, after all, made by an angel,
and angels know what they are saying!

With time,

- what Jesus deposited in the heart
- what believers discovered through meditation on the Scriptures
- what believers discovered in living relationship with Christ,
and with Mary, whom Christ gives to us

the belief that Mary was without sin *from her conception* emerged.

Such is the mystery of Tradition:

revelation deposited in human hearts, "ripened", and brought to light.

Jesus shares Mary with us.

Mary is the precious pearl of his heart, and he so loves us that he gives her to us.

And when we receive someone, with time we discover who they are.

With time, the Church, i.e. the persons who are the Church, discovered who Mary is.

The Immaculate Conception (to be distinguished from the Immaculate *Collection*)
is not a literal obviousness.

The Immaculate Conception is a loving discovery.

This may sound like a facile explanation and /or justification.

But just think of how much one discovers another person through love

beyond their resume, *beyond* their curriculum vitae, *beyond* their profile.

You are so much more than your MySpace page,

and the *more* can only be discovered through love.

In 1854, Pope Pius proclaimed officially what had long been in hearts:
**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, Savior of the human race,
preserved immune from all stain of original sin.**

Mary was first granted such a privilege so that she might be perfectly free
to welcome all that God would do in her,
ultimately to welcome the Word into her womb.
This singular grace made her freer.
Grace increases our freedom...

Now, this may sound abstract, and leads to a question that sometimes arises:
If Mary is without sin, is she not without struggle, and, in the end, rather distant?
How can she relate to us if she doesn't get down and dirty?!?
Where am I suppose to find her if she isn't in the same mire of life's complexity?

To respond, another question needs be posed:
Are we closer to one another when we have similar struggles
or when we love one another?
Interestingly, having similar struggles does grant a certain analogical grasp
of the dynamic of what another person is experiencing.
But is it not only love that grants one to *share* in another person's struggle?
Let me put it bluntly:
If I have cancer and you have cancer, does that automatically make us friends?

Mary's Immaculate Conception means that her person, her life knew only love.
She was conceived without any "scars of the heart".
If this is the case, then with her nothing impedes closeness.
Our wounds, our issues, our limitations, our failings can all impede closeness.
With Mary nothing impedes closeness

Because she was conceived without sin, however, Mary's life was not a free ride.
She still has to *choose* to love.
And choose to love she did.
And choose to love us she does.
She was conceived without sin and remained without sin.
Consequently, she is *unbelievably, unfathomably* close to us.
To celebrate her is

- to welcome her
- to receive her from Jesus' heart

Let us do so as playful, trusting children, full of wonder and cheer...