

Mary's Immaculate Conception

This Monday, December 9, is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, a Holy Day. This special day is equal in solemnity to Sunday and every Catholic should attend Mass on this day. Our Masses on Monday, December 9, will be at 12:00 Noon- Ss. Cyril & Methodius, 6:30 p.m.- Holy Trinity, and 8:00 p.m.- Ss. Cyril & Methodius. Usually this Holy Day is on December 8, but since December is on a Sunday this year the Holy Day is moved to Monday.

Many people do not quite understand what the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The Immaculate Conception can be explained as follows:

"We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX solemnly defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1854.

In essence this means that Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, St. Ann, without the stain of Original Sin. Everyone else, except for Jesus, is born with the stain of Original Sin. This is washed away when we are baptized.

Even though this teaching was not defined and made into a dogma of our faith until 1854, it always was a teaching of the Church. This can be seen as written by the Fathers of the Church:

- - Implicitly found in the Fathers of the Church in the parallelism between Eve and Mary (Irenaeus of Lyons, 140-202);
- - Found in the more general terms about Mary: "holy", "innocent", "most pure", "intact", "immaculate" (Irenaeus of Lyons, 140-202; Ephraem of Syria, 306-373; Ambrose of Milan, 373-397);
- - Explicit language: Mary - free from original sin (Augustine of Hippo, 395-430 to Anselm of Normandy, 1033-1109);
- - Eastern Church: celebrated a Feast of the Conception of Mary in the 8th to the 9th Century;
- - Western Church: celebrated a Feast of the Conception of Mary in the 12th Century;

A record of the feast in the 11th Century in Great Britain; in the 12th Century in Normandy, France, Germany, Italy and Spain in the 12th Century (Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-1153);

Now the Church continues to elucidate the scriptural basis of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

There are two passages in Scripture which point us to this truth. We look first at Genesis 3.15, in which we see the parallel between Mary and Eve of which the early Church Fathers already spoke: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The Jews saw this passage as referring to the struggle between Christ and Satan, and so the Church sees in "the woman" a prophetic foreshadowing of the Virgin Mary (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, # 55). If there is to be complete enmity between the woman and the serpent, then she never should have been in any way subject to him even briefly. This implies an Immaculate conception. We can also reason from the text of Lk 1:28,30,37 in which the angel calls her "full of grace". In this verse we can see even more strongly the complete enmity with the serpent--for God's grace is completely opposed to Satan's reign. But if Mary was "full of grace," it seems that she must have been conceived immaculate. Even though Mary was full of grace at the start of her life, yet she could still grow, for, as it were, her capacity for grace could increase.

In general, a soul will grow in proportion to these things: (1) The greater the dignity of the person, the greater the merit. In her case, the dignity of Mother of God is the highest possible for a creature. (2) The greater the work, the greater the merit: her cooperation in the redemption was the greatest work possible to a creature. (3) The greater the love, the greater the merit. Love of God means the attachment of our will to His. Her will adhered supremely, with no obstacle at all, so that even ordinary household duties, which she saw as the will of the Father for her, were supremely valuable. If only all of us could view our daily tasks and duties with this attitude and with such faith.

Hope this short article has helped you in having a better understanding of Mary's Immaculate Conception.